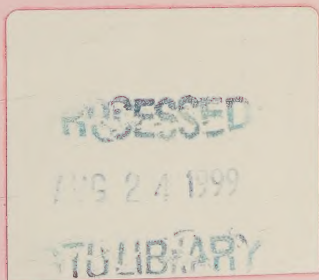


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Time: Biblical Perspectives

Edited by

Augustine Mulloor

Jeevadhara

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Prophets: Bridges between the Past and the Future

Editorial

The arrival of a new millennium - perhaps for the first time in history virtually known by every one on earth - seems to affect us terribly, both as individuals and as communities. We are very time-conscious today. The experience of time we have, when consciously scrutinized, is tantamount to experience of persons, events, circumstances and to that of effects and consequences of such encounters. When the area of experience includes also the encounter with the divine, timeless and eternal, then the whole reality of time is invested with a new dimension. Accordingly, the very quality of life is raised and the dynamism of life articulated in actions, reactions and relationships enters a new realm. So time and history go hand in hand.

This is the biblical horizon in which time, i.e., history has to be re-read and reinterpreted with the Christ-event as the central point of reference.

The four contributions in this issue prepared by four Bible specialists, try to reinterpret the reality of time from various historical moments of the Bible represented by various streams of vision such as Prophets, Paul, Synoptic Gospels and John. There are elements that unify and integrate diverse strands of thinking and re-thinking just as there are wide diversities of vision. Ultimately, the challenge brought by every vision is to overcome the difference between the past and the future and to find the present as the concrete rendezvous with the divine, eternal and timeless.

Augustine Mulloor

Editorial

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Augustine Mulloor

Prophets: Bridges between the Past and the Future

J. Susaimanickam

Israel as a community understands herself only as she recognizes her rootedness in the past. From the past experience, she is taken to a future, that is, to the alternative society. This is made possible through the day of Yahweh, the New Covenant, the future mission and the eschatological vision. The middle point is the present in which the function of a prophet is to build bridges between the past and the future. What emerges from this discussion is the challenge to the Christian community to be a bridge between the past and the future and thus to fulfill its prophetic mission.

Introduction

The Old Testament prophet is commonly understood as someone who was very much concerned with events to come, more specifically, as one who not only predicted the coming of the future Messiah, the Christ, but also foretold precise details about his mission, life and death¹. The preposition *pro* in the Greek verb *pro-phemi* from which the noun *prophetes* and its English equivalent *prophet* derive, has a personal meaning: 'on behalf of', 'for', 'instead of' someone; hence the word prophet originally referred to one who spoke on behalf of someone, generally a deity. It has also a spatial meaning 'in front of'. And yet its temporal meaning ('before'; hence prophet meant 'one who spoke before something happened') has been in the course of time emphasized.² If the prophet speaks about the future it is always

1 J. Blenkinsopp, "Prophetism and Prophets", in W.R. Farmer (ed), *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998) 951; J-P. Prevost, *How to Read the Prophets* (London: SCM Press, 1996) 1; A.R. Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992) 165.

2 H.G. Liddel and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) 704; also Prevost, *Prophets*, 6-7. The Septuagint, the

in his function of the present and with reference to the past. He foretells calamities which he foresees occurring as punishment for injustices done at present (Isa 1:23-31; Amos 8:7; Mic 3:12), or he promises, future salvation which he sees as the ultimate outcome of Yahweh's continuing fidelity to his covenant contracted in the past (Isa 11:1-9; 65:17-25; Mic 4:1-4; Hos 14:4-7).³

The Hebrew Bible has no general word for 'time' and likewise no special term for the categories of time like the past, present and future. Thanks to the influence of Greek thought, the modern, especially the Western and Christian mind usually considers time as linear, as "an infinitely long straight line on which the individual can mark such past and future events as he can ascertain. This time-span has a mid-point, which is our own present day. From it the past stretches back and the future forwards"⁴. Whereas ancient Israel's perception of time was quite different. She did not think of time in the abstract, time divorced from specific events, but 'time furnished with content'; all that she knew was 'time as containing events'⁵. Hence cultic festivals and not absolute time had significance for the Israelites (Ps 118:24; 136).

Israel began to realise that her present was based on an earlier series of creative events, the exodus from Egypt prefaced by the patriarchal age and rounded off by the events connected with the entry into Canaan. It was Yahweh who established the continuity between the various separate events and who ordained their direction

early Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, most frequently translated the Hebrew *nabi* by the Greek *prophetes*. Although the etymology of *nabi* is still disputed, modern scholars are of the opinion that it refers to someone who speaks in the name of somebody else, especially of Yahweh (Jer 15:19; Deut 18:18; Ex 4:10-16; 7:1). Thus *prophetes* accurately captures the primary meaning of *nabi*. See J. Jeremias, "Profeta", in E. Jenni and C. Westermann (eds), *Dizionario Teologico dell' Antico Testamento II* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1982) 6-7. Also Ceresko, *Introduction*, 166-170. Interestingly enough, *nabi* does not have temporal sense.

3 G.M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of the Biblical Prophet", *Conference of Religious of India* 7 (1987) 1

4 G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II* (London: SCM Press, 1965) 99.

5 Von Rad, *Theology*, 100; E. Jenni, "Time", in G.A. Buttrick (ed), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible IV* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) 643.

as they followed one another in time (see Deut 5:2-3; 29:10-15).⁶ In this way the past, present and future are inter-related and one is determined by the rest. In the words of R.P. Carroll, "In certain senses human societies may generally be described in terms of a present determined by factors in the past and of having a future that will be determined by the present."⁷

Our concern here is to see how the prophets tried 'to bind together past and future in one uninterrupted history of salvation' and thereby to establish the present-day validity of the covenant wrought in the past and to draw lessons for the future,⁸ as we are on the threshold of the third millennium.

I. Shaping the Present

Israel had a very different idea of history too. History for her existed only in so far as Yahweh accompanied her. As von Rad has remarked, "It was God who established the continuity between the various separate events and who ordained their direction as they followed one another in time."⁹

Accordingly Yahweh irrupts suddenly and unexpectedly into the life of the prophets and commissions them for a specific task in history – at a particular period in the history of the Israelites. Prophets are men of the present, interested first and foremost in the present, in order to change the present. The prime concern of their oracles is the present history of the people.¹⁰

6 Von Rad, *Theology*, 102-106; also D.P. Reid, *What are they saying about the Prophets?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) 49-52.

7 R.P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM Press, 1979) 31.

8 Blenkinsopp, "Prophetism and Prophets", 951.

9 Von Rad, *Theology*, 106.

10 D.J. Muthunayagam ("Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophets and Economic Issues", *Voices from the Third World* 20 (1997) 57): "Prophets forged their messages out of contemporary developments and spoke to their people on the basis of keen insight and analysis of current events." Speaking about the relation between history and prophecy, B. Peckham (*History and Prophecy: The Development of Late Judean Literary Traditions* [New York: Doubleday, 1993] 1) observes:

For this reason the oracles of the classical prophets are as a rule dated. A characteristic of the prophetic books is that each of them begins with a superscription, a short phrase or sentence giving the name of the prophet whose words follow and providing the reader with information about where and when he lived and how he received his mission from Yahweh (e.g., Jer 1:1-3; Ezek 1:1-3; Isa 1:1; Hos 1:1). Therefore any discussion today on prophetic identity cannot be carried on 'without reference to the social location of the prophet and the social determinants of prophetic states of consciousness and behaviour'.¹¹ "This way of introducing these books," writes J.W. Miller, "alerts their readers to the fact that only as they are acquainted with what was actually going on in Israel when these kings ruled will they fully comprehend what these prophets were meaning to say."¹² Writing in this vein, Prevost comments: "The Word of God is not timeless and should not be detached from the history which gave it birth. So it is important to read prophecy in the present; before even wanting to apply it to our times, or to Christianize it, we must first listen to it in its original context."¹³

Prophets were raised up by Yahweh from society and they sustained a prominent relationship with society. Therefore they were primarily concerned with 'life in the present', and were 'practical in

"History and prophecy were correlative. History was literate prose tradition, prophecy a schooled poetic tradition. Each was written with a view toward the other, history revealing the reasonable bases of life over time, and prophecy injecting the gathering past with a sense of futurity, willingness, and change. History could be pleasing, instructive, and impersonal. Prophecy was particular, adamant, and demanding...."

- 11 Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 30-39.
- 12 J.W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 14.
- 13 Prevost, *Prophets*, 9. He would even go to the extent of saying: "If the word of the prophets had eternal value, one prophet would have been enough: as an extreme, one could have been content with the words of Moses, of Elijah or Isaiah. But precisely because the prophetic word arises for a given era and in response to precise needs, there have been a great variety of spokesmen..." (pp. 9-10).

dealing with the concerns of their own localities and generations'.¹⁴ As such they were more sensitive beings to perceive the darker side of society and to hear the unvoiced groanings of the unfortunate masses at the bottom of the social pyramid. They also launched their vehement critique of society with trenchant denunciations especially against the enormous social and economic gap between various groups within the country. To give an example, prophet Amos was outraged by the corruption and oppression he witnessed in the various towns of Israel and among neighbouring countries (Amos 1:3-6:14). This can be said also of prophets like Hosea (4:1-3), Isaiah (1:21-26; 5:8-24), Jeremiah (11:9-13; 22:13-19) and Ezekiel (22:1-31). So much so Laney remarks that the list of sins rebuked by the prophets 'reads like a moral commentary on contemporary society'.¹⁵ The theology of the prophets is thus linked to concrete life situations, to historical problems of the life of the people and to contemporary events. Their message always derives from a reflection on what is going on around them.¹⁶ J. Lindblom, therefore, concludes:

The prophets were primarily men with a message for their own time, denouncing the sins of their people and summoning them to repentance. Many predictions which have been interpreted as eschatological obviously deal with events which the prophets expected to happen within the normal course of history.¹⁷

14 J.C. Laney, "The Prophets and Social Concern", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990) 33, 42. Incidentally D.E. Fleming ("The Etymological Origins of the Hebrew *nabi*: The One Who Invokes God", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 [1993] 217-224) argues for a Syrian root *nabu (m)* for the Hebrew word *nabi*, meaning 'to name'. In that case, *nabi* is one who invokes the gods/the name of Yahweh for power and guidance, one who intercedes on behalf of the people, one who speaks the people's word to Yahweh. See J. Susaimanickam, *Jeremiah, Spokesman of the People: The Role of Intercession in the Framework of Jeremiah's Prophetic Mission in the Light of Jer 27:18* (Unpublished Paper submitted for the Licentiate in Scripture at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 1985).

15 Laney, "Prophets and Social Concern", 42.

16 Soares-Prabhu, "Socio-Cultural Analysis in Prophetic Theologizing: A Biblical Paradigm", in K. Pathil (ed), *Socio-Cultural Analysis in Theologizing* (Bangalore: ITA, 1987) 176.

17 J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962) 362.

To quote K. Koch, "Prophets are distinguished from mere soothsayers in that they base what is impending on the present, drawing their conclusions from the moral behaviour of the people round them."¹⁸

Men of the present, prophets were first and foremost concerned about shaping the present, their own present and that of their audience whom they invited to live the present more meaningfully, but always in the light of their past – against the backdrop of the alternative vision of society they had gained through the foundational event of exodus.

II. Rooted in the Past

It is more widely recognized today that prophetism dates back possibly to the earliest days of Israel. But with the emergence of monarchy, the role of the prophets changed.¹⁹

In the Israel's past, Yahweh took the oppressed Israelites, in fact, the whole exploited lower class of Egypt, completely out of the situation of oppression and impoverishment, in order to make of these unequals an egalitarian, non-stratified society – a society in opposition to other societies in the world without a central power – a nation of sisters and brothers in which there would be no poor (cf Deut 15:4).²⁰ The covenant, which Yahweh contracted with these people, now turned 'his people', was meant to uphold and realise this great ideal 'with a definite social configuration spelled out in the great codes of the Pentateuch'.²¹ As W.A. Brueggemann put it,

Israel is 'a social experiment' in the world of the ancient Near East to see if a community can be organized in

18 K. Koch, *The Prophets I: The Assyrian Period* (London: SCM Press, 1982) 2.

19 Ceresko, *Introduction*, 173-174.

20 N.F. Lohfink, *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principles of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible* (Berkeley: BIBAL Press, 1987) 33-47; G.V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987) 118-122; Soares-Prabhu, "Biblical Prophet", 8-10. This can be in a way compared to *Samaththuvapuram* ('village of equality') put up in every civil district of Tamilnadu. Consisting of people from different castes and creeds chosen from the lower rungs of society, it is a bold attempt of the Tamilnadu government to restore societal harmony in the wake of communal clashes that quite recently broke out on a major scale all over southern Tamilnadu.

21 Soares-Prabhu, "Prophetic Theologizing", 172.

egalitarian (covenantal) patterns, in resistance to the hierarchical, bureaucratic modes of the world of the city-states. The alternative model of social organization seeks to distribute powers so that all members are treated with dignity, so that all members have access to social goods and social power.²²

'The tribes of Yahweh' attempted to live out this alternative vision of exodus – alternative to the great, violent, exploitative and oppressive city-states among which they settled down. In point of fact, this contrast society was short-lived because, the tribal confederation that Israel was after its settlement in Canaan slowly moved away from the great ideals of equality and liberty, as there were undoubtedly anomalies and socio-economic imbalances (1 Sam 9:1; 22:2; 25:10-11). It was virtually returning to the oppression and injustice of the past in Egypt.²³

Moreover, in the wake of the Ammonite crisis (1 Sam 11:1-15), and later of the Philistine military upsurge (1 Sam 17:1-18:5) which posed a serious threat to the Israelites' very existence as a free people, they had no other viable alternative than opting for monarchy.²⁴

The principal duty of the king was to administer justice within the kingdom especially by protecting the poor and vulnerable members of the society and to maintain harmony and peace among the citizens (1 Kgs 10:9; Ps 72:1-4). But with the establishment of monarchy, the 'model society' became a far cry from the 'Mosaic revolution'. More specifically, when Solomon consolidated his royal power at the expense of the people, he changed the tribal league into the Canaanite city-state model of hierarchy and social stratification and thereby paved the way for 'early capitalism' – a kind of counter-revolution.²⁵

By this process and his policies Solomon effectively reverses the movement of Mosaic revolution by countering

22 W.A. Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (ed. by P.D. Miller, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 58.

23 Ceresko, *Introduction*, 135-140.

24 Rui de Menezes, "Societies in Transition: Israel and the Tribes of North East India", *Indian Theological Studies* 34 (1997) 29-39.

25 Rui de Menezes, "Societies in Transition", 29-39; Ceresko, *Introduction*, 135-148.

Israel's economics of equality (Ex 16:18) with an economics of affluence founded on the concentration of wealth (1 Kgs 4:20-23); by subverting its policies of justice (Lev 23:35-42) with a politics of oppression which restores forced labour (1 Kgs 5:13-18); and by replacing its religion of the absolute freedom of God with a 'state religion' in which Yahweh, confined to a Temple, is domesticated as the legitimizing patron of his imperial system. The pre-Exodus situation of Egypt is nearly restored.²⁶

Thus the 'Yahweh society' began to deteriorate and disintegrate.

It was against this situation that the prophets voiced a social protest and challenged the kings for violating the covenant laws²⁷; reminded the people of their great ideal; decried and denounced all kinds of oppression and exploitation; demanded justice²⁸. They became "spokesmen of God, the covenant God and his 'alternative community' because of an intensely personal call – experience."²⁹ Thus the prophets' point of reference was always to the distant past, to the counter society which they attempted to revive and renew³⁰.

As a result the criticism of the prophets was twofold: religious as well as social. It was religious in so far as they condemned idolatry. The growing temptation for Israel was to abandon Yahweh the God of freedom, the God who demands justice and hates oppression (Jer 7:1-15; 2:20-28; 18:13-17; Ezek 18:5-9; 6:1-7), and to go after false gods/idols of the surrounding countries, which legitimized slavery, prostitution, oppression, accumulation of wealth and the like.³¹ More

26 Soares-Prabhu, "Prophetic Theologizing," 174; see Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 32-37.

27 Rui de Menezes, "Societies in Transition", 37-39; D.J. McCarthy, "Prophets and Covenant Community", *Jeevadhara* 11 (1981) 112.

28 Brueggemann, "A Gospel Language of Pain and Possibility", *Horizons in Biblical Theology: An International Dialogue* 13 (1991) 105-13; cf Lohfink, *Option for the Poor*, 59-73.

29 Soares-Prabhu, "Biblical Prophet", 23; "Prophetic Theologizing", 176.

30 Soares-Prabhu, "Prophetic Theologizing", 174-75.

31 B. Wielenga, *It's a Long Road to Freedom: Perspectives of Biblical Theology - The First Testament* 1 (rev. ed; Madurai: TTBC, 1988) 118-120; Rui de Menezes, "Social Justice in Israel's Law", *Bible Bhashyam* 11 (1985) 15-16; E. Tamez,

than anyone it is Hosea who underscores the importance of Israel's vertical relationship with Yahweh.

However, right kind of relationship with Yahweh, according to the preexilic prophets, cannot come about by merely observing the customary cultic practices, but rather by the practicing of social justice in human relations. On the contrary, the leaders, the rich and the powerful tried to cover up their criminal and immoral deeds by means of unjust and meaningless religious practices.³² This is the reason why the prophets exposed the social evils, namely the multifarious crimes of the ruling class which had rejected social justice and, by the same token, had rejected its God (Amos 2:6-8; 4:4-13; 5:1-27; 6:4-14; 8:4-14; Isa 3:13-15; 58:1-14; Jer 5:20-31; Hos 6:4-10). Thus social protest and the critique of religion go closely together in their preaching.³³ Consequently Blenkinsopp boldly states that "a society that neglects justice and righteousness, *even one in which religion flourishes*, does not deserve to survive."³⁴

Bible of the Oppressed (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982) 33-35; P. Richard, "Biblical Theology of Confrontation with Idols", in P. Richard and Others (eds), *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology* (New York, 1983) 3-25; G. Gutierrez, *The God of Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991) 48-56.

- 32 E.C. John, "The Complementarity of the Sacred and Secular in the Prophetic Tradition", *Jeevadhara* 17 (1987) 142; Muthunayagam, "Prophets and Economic Issues", 63.
- 33 John, "Sacred and Secular", 142-145; Soares-Prabhu, "Prophetic Theologizing", 174-175; "Biblical Prophet", 12; Laney, "Prophets and Social Concern", 32-43; J. Limburg, *The Prophets and the Powerless* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977); P. Kalliveetil, "Social Criticism as the Prophetic Role: A Biblical Prolegomenon", *Jeevadhara* 19 (1989) 132-158; K.J. Varghese, "Israel's Prophets and Man's Economic Liberation", *Jeevadhara* 6 (1976) 177-187; G. Koonthanam, "Prophets in a World Divided by Wealth and Power", *Bible Bhashyam* 1(1975) 182-194; J. Kallikuzhuppil, "Liberation in Amos and Micah", *Bible Bhashyam* 11 (1985) 215-223; T.A. Joseph, "Social and Political Prestoroika in Proto-Isaiah", *Jeevadhara* 19 (1989) 89-104; R. Vande Walle, "The Minor Prophets as Conscientizers", *Jeevadhara* 19 (1989) 118-132; G. Robinson, "The New Economic Order in the Light of the Message of the Pre-Exilic Prophets", *Bible Bhashyam* 22 (1996) 238-254. However, Amos is the one who spoke most about the right kind of horizontal relationship among human beings. Hence he is known as the 'prophet of social justice' (Cf Amos 5:21-24).
- 34 Blenkinsopp, "Prophetism and Prophets", 956. Hence John ("Sacred and Secular", 144) remarks that 'justice and righteousness are two qualities which bind together the sacred and the secular'

In this manner the prophets formed the social conscience of the people and invited them to try the alternative world vision of exodus – alternative to their own present world.³⁵

At this juncture, it is good to draw here the attention of the reader to the manner he has to read and interpret the books of the prophets and, for that matter, any portion of the Sacred Scripture. In spite of severe opposition from several quarters, the prophets had a following, circles of disciples who remained faithful to their masters, and continued to re-read their sayings in the light of new situations and changed circumstances. They did not slavishly apply the prophecies of the past as solutions to present-day problems; but rather they adapted them to meet the needs of the present moment. In this way, "Prophecy engenders prophecy", to quote Prevost³⁶ Thus the prophetic books offer a fresh model and contextual approach for reading and interpreting the Sacred Scripture.³⁷

III. Predicting the Future

Rooted deeply in the past, the prophets exhorted the people to lead a genuine moral life in the present after the blueprint for a better life provided by the God of the covenant. Concretely it meant that the people who had turned away from Yahweh and went after other gods should turn back to him: "Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They have held fast to deceit, they have refused to return" (Jer 8:5). In other words, prophets made an appeal to people

35 Cf Brueggemann, *Social Reading*, 226-227.

36 Prevost, *Prophets*, 10. This is how the classical prophecies of the preexilic Isaiah of Jerusalem, known today as Proto-Isaiah (Isa 1-39), gave rise to the book of the anonymous prophet of the exilic period, Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40-55), and the latter in its turn during the postexilic time engendered Trito-Isaiah (Isa 56-66). This can be said of several other prophets too, especially of Zechariah: Zechariah 1 (Zech 1-8) and Zechariah II (Zech 9-14). Again as Prevost would say: "The word of prophets like Amos and Isaiah, so hard for its original audience to understand, suddenly served as a beacon in the night. Hence this intense activity of re-reading their oracles which has provided us with new texts, bringing a singular hope" (p. 123).

37 Regarding 're-readings', see The Pontifical Biblical Commission. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1994) III. A. 1. This way of re-reading the Bible in the light of new situations and applying it to contemporary circumstances of the people is called by the PBC document as 'Actualization' (see IV. A).

to cease from evil in order to do good, to desist from oppression in favour of vindicating the oppressed, to seek Yahweh rather than other gods, to exercise justice and righteousness in society – in short, to turn from the present way of life to a proper form of living (Amos 5:4-6, 24; Isa 1:16-17; Jer 3:1-4:14; Mic 6:8; Hos 6:1-3; Zeph 2:3).³⁸

More than others Ezekiel emphasizes personal responsibility for one's actions (Ezek 18; 3:17-21; 14:1-11; 22:1-16; cf Jer 31:29-30), and consequently on individual repentance and conversion. This was not in view of diverting the judgement already pronounced against Judah and Jerusalem, but of building the new community by preparing its individual members to take part in that rebuilding.³⁹

Sociologists of religion make a distinction between 'ideological religion' and 'utopian religion'. Ideological religion, according to them, 'legitimizes the existing social order, defends the dominant values, enhances the authority of the dominant class and creates an imagination suggesting that society is stable and perdures'. Whereas utopian religion 'reveals the ills of the present order, inverts the dominant values of society, undermines the authority of the ruling groups, and makes people expect the downfall of the present system'. The latter also 'refers to visions of a new society that evokes criticism of the present order, and releases energy for social change'. Thus religion is both complex and ambiguous: it is both the creator of ideologies and the bearer of utopias; it acts as legitimation for the *status quo* and as a catalyst for social change.⁴⁰

In their endeavour to reconstruct the Jewish community, the prophets, like the utopians, envisaged a new beginning in the history of the Jewish people; return of the people to the land; restoration of the fortunes of the land; promise of a prosperous and abundant life to the people. Therefore they harped on four important themes: 1. The day of the Lord; 2. The new covenant; 3. The future Messiah; 4. Eschatology. We will analyze them below briefly.

38 Carroll, *Prophecy*, 21-24; H. Mowvey, *Reading the Old Testament Prophets Today* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) 108-114, 121-125.

39 Ceresko, *Introduction*, 230.

40 G. Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975) 102-110.

1. The Day of the Lord

In the event of the leaders' reluctance to change their ways, described as hardheartedness or rebelliousness, the Pre-exilic prophets did not hesitate to denounce the various breaches of just relationships within society and to announce the judgement of Yahweh - the national catastrophe of 587 BC. To quote Reid,

The prophets experience deeply that God is coming in judgement and seeks to relate that coming to the present. In how the people respond ethically to the demands of God in the present, they prepare to receive the future which God's coming to them constitutes. Or stated another way: the prophets experience the advent of God in judgement against Israel. Assured as they are of this fact, they announce it to the people. They seek to find in the people's conduct why it is that God comes to judge.⁴¹

Hence the preexilic prophets are generally known as 'the prophets of doom'. Invariably they speak of the day of the Lord/Yahweh (Amos 5:18-27; Isa 13:6, 9; Jer 46:10; Ezek 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11). Originally the day of the Lord marked a great turning point in history: Yahweh would crush the enemies of Israel (Joel 3; 1-3) and usher in a time of salvation and victory for Israel. The Israelites, therefore, were eagerly looking forward to that day. However, they began to be intimidated by it, because, according to later understanding, Yahweh was to punish all the unjust people, the foreign nations as well as the Jewish people. Hence it is described variously as 'the day of judgement'

41 Reid, *Prophets*, 51-52. Reid continues: "The fulfilment of the promise of the Lord of the future is tied into the people's ethical response in the present. It is the prophet's task to pinpoint the moral continuity or threaten the moral discontinuity between the present and future. Both the tragedy of sin and the joy of a turn-about are found in the prophets' juxtaposing human moral discontinuity and the loving divine continuity of an ongoing creation" (p. 54). Commenting on the relation between the present and the future, Prevost (*Prophets*, 9) points out: "The prime concern of their oracles is the present history of their people. That does not mean that the prophets are confined to the horizon of their own history. They are equally passionate about the future, but this is a future with which they have contact. They reject a determinist reading of history, and they believe that the future is connected with the initiative of God and the response of human freedom."

(Amos 8:2-3), 'the day of wrath' (Ezek 7:19; Zeph 1:18), 'the day of darkness' (Amos 5:20; Joel 2:1-2), 'the day of whirlwind' (Amos 1:14), 'the day of vengeance' (Isa 34:8), etc. Similar expressions like 'that day', 'the day of' and 'the day when' appear nearly 200 times in the prophetic books. By means of this the prophets warned the people that 'that day' would soon dawn on them in the form of cosmic or meteorological catastrophes or of powerful enemy armies which would bring Yahweh's judgement against them for breaking the covenant requirements of the law. That day, they proclaimed, was near (Ezek 7:7; Joel 2:1; Zeph 1:7) – nay, it has already come (Ezek 7:10; 39:8; Mal 4:1)⁴² Nevertheless they also promised that a 'remnant' would be saved (Isa 10:20-23; 37:31-32; Amos 3:9-12; 5:15; Mal 3:3-18).

2. The New Covenant

Once the Babylonian invasion had overtaken the Israelites and all false hopes of averting it had come to nothing, prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah began to look beyond disaster with unconditional hope (Jer 27:11; 30:1-33:26; Ezek 36:1-48:35; Isa 40:1-55:13). They spoke of the future which Yahweh was preparing for his people and constantly proclaimed their restoration. They comforted them with confident hope (see Sir 49:10)⁴³. In other words, the post-exilic prophets proclaimed a new message of hope in the midst of hopelessness; they had 'the capacity and boldness to speak about a new world beyond the loss of 587'. Hence they are called 'the prophets of hope', or better still, 'the voice of hope'.⁴⁴

More particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel appear as teachers whose role is to induce a change of heart and of conduct in the country by announcing a *new covenant* which will provide spiritual power for

42 R.H. Hiers, "Day of the Lord", in D.N. Freedman (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 82-83; also Von Rad, *Theology*, 119-125.

43 J. Barton, "Prophecy (Postexilic Hebrew)", in D.N. Freedman (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* V (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 489-490. So much so Prevost (*Prophets*, 17) says: "Eleven books out of the fifteen end with grandiose perspectives of salvation: the people is gathered together, healed, consolidated and saved, and the nations ascend to Jerusalem to form the vast people of the saved."

44 Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 1-7.

the people to walk in a way more intimate than the old covenant. Jeremiah is one who speaks more about the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34; 32:37-41; 24:5-7) and therefore he is known as 'the preacher of the new covenant'. As Ceresko observes, the Jeremian oracles "represent a radical new vision of a Torah founded on a profound conversion of heart and based on a thoroughly internalized desire and commitment to the vision and ideals of a community and society built on justice and love."⁴⁵ Ezekiel, however, deepens this important theme (Ezek 36:25-28; 16:60-63; 11:17-20). R.P. Carroll says:

During the exilic period some circles saw hope for the future in a new, permanent covenant involving the whole community and including the Davidic king Hopes for the future have been modelled on the past, with a few modifications to deal with unresolved problems. Although the motif of the new covenant is not developed in either of the two traditions, it may represent a restoration programme (or an element in such a programme) put forward by deuteronomists and others for the shaping of the future community in Jerusalem.⁴⁶

And N. Lohfink makes it clear by affirming that the new covenant is in direct continuity with what constituted the 'covenant' which God made with his people when he took it by the hand and led it out of Egypt. What God instituted then covered not only the law itself. It included the gift of the land, the making of a people, and material blessing, and then the torah for life in the land: a social order filled with prosperity.⁴⁷

No wonder, then, that H.W. Wolff concludes: "Prophecy does not simply perpetuate the assured faith of ancient Israel; on the contrary, it broaches a wholly new alternative."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ceresko, *Introduction*, 213-214.

⁴⁶ R.P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM Press, 1981) 222.

⁴⁷ N. Lohfink, *The Covenant Never Revoked: Biblical Reflections on Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) 51. Interestingly Lohfink relates the dramatic nature of the new covenant to the watchword 'the option for the poor' (pp. 85-86)

⁴⁸ H.W. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 7.

3. The Future Messiah ⁴⁹

Prophets believed that the new covenant would give people the power and resources to work actively towards the establishing of social justice; and yet they recognized that complete justice and righteousness would ultimately be restored only by the Messiah – the anointed one, the Christ.

Amos speaks of the reestablishment of the Davidic dynasty which will be accompanied by fertility, prosperity and plenty (Amos 9:11-15). Proto-Isaiah takes up the idea of a descendant of David bringing total well-being, by his perfectly just and righteous rule, not only to Israel but to the whole universe (Isa 11:1-9; 9:1-7; 7:10-25). Micah looks for a new ruler from Bethlehem (as David was from Bethlehem), who will lead his people into security and raise them up above all other nations (Mic 5:2-15).

Jeremiah too occasionally looks forward to a new David. Again this new age will be characterized by a qualitative transformation of the conditions of human life (Jer 23:1-8; 30:1-31:40). This is true also of Ezekiel (Ezek 37:15-28) who further declares that like a good shepherd Yahweh will restore his people gathering them from far and wide and providing them with a new shepherd, a Davidic king, to rule over them (Ezek 34:1-31).

The above passages about the Messiah, especially those of Isaiah, proclaim a utopian vision of the peaceful and harmonious society which will result from a righteous rule. The prophetic talk about the future and the language eventually adapted to the Messianic theme was more directed to the present, and was meant to function in the present either as an indictment of the injustice of the present order and a call to overturn or change it. Or, if this proved too dangerous or self-defeating, then such utopian passages were meant to instill hope and encouragement to continue to resist and struggle as best as one can in the present circumstances against the present unjust arrangements (e.g., Isa 7:10-25).⁵⁰

49 M. de Jonge, "Messiah", in D.N. Freedman (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* IV (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 780-81; Mowvey, *Prophets Today*, 126-30.

50 Ceresko, *Introduction*, 192-195.

However, the post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zecharia thought that the hopes of a Davidic ruler were already fulfilled in Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah (Hag 2:20-23; Zech 4:6-10). But many of the hopes remained unfulfilled. Particularly no new David arose to govern the people in justice and righteousness and provide peace and security. And yet the people continued to wait for the Messiah who would restore the primordial, paradisiacal harmony and establish a new social order – 'new heavens and a new earth' (Isa 65:8-25; 43:8-29) – an alternative world.⁵¹

4. Eschatology

Although used with widely differing meanings, the term eschatology is generally understood as the doctrine of the last things and more broadly it refers to the expectation of any decisive change in the course of history through the intervention of God; it refers to matters concerning the judgement after the death and end of the world.⁵² Carroll contends:

If eschatology is understood in its literal sense as the doctrine of the last things, or the final things, or even the ultimate things then prophecy had no eschatology. If eschatology is understood in a much weaker sense as talk about the future in terms extrapolated from the present and the past and indicative of a belief and a hope in the future then biblical prophecy had an eschatological dimension.⁵³

Prophecy has developed an eschatology, a sense that there was a goal, a purpose, toward which Israel's history was moving; it talks about a day or period in the near future when the present troubles would cease and a more prosperous life would dawn on the Israelites. These ideas are further explicated in Joel 2:28-3:21; Zech 9-14; Isa 24-27, the so-called Isaian apocalypse.⁵⁴

51 These texts have been re-read and re-interpreted by the early Christians as having been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

52 J.J. Collins, "Old Testament Apocalypticism and Eschatology", in R.E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R.E. Murphy (eds), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Bangalore: TPI, 1990) 298; Von Rad, *Theology*, 112-119.

53 Carroll, *Prophecy*, 37-38. Also J. Bright, *Covenant and Promise: The Future in the Preaching of the Pre-exilic Prophets* (London: SCM Press, 1977) 15-24.

54 For details, see Blenkinsopp, *History*, 226-239.

In developing these themes, the prophets drew extensively on mythic scenarios and cosmic imagery, similar to the creation stories (cf Gen 1-11). They also spoke of particular historical crises as if they involved the destruction or renewal of the world (e.g., Jer 4:23-26; Isa 11:1-9).⁵⁵ This utopian language is later sharpened by 'early apocalypticism' which foresees a 'new age' beyond 'the end' of eschatology.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Biblical prophets were not clairvoyants or futurologists. And yet the criterion for distinguishing true prophecy from false is stated to be future fulfilment (Deut 18:14-22), which is a major concern for the Deuteronomists who argue that Yahweh is true to his word. Hence the theme of prophecy and fulfilment runs like a golden thread throughout their literature. By this they aim at theologically legitimizing the disaster of 587 BC and encouraging the victims by foretelling that Yahweh would raise up for and from among them a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15, 18).⁵⁷

In the fullness of time the God of the covenant did raise up a prophet like Moses – in fact, a prophet greater than Moses, a prophet *par excellence*, in the person of Jesus Christ who is considered 'the end-time prophet' (Acts 3:22-23). He proclaimed the imminent coming of the kingdom, explained it through his parables and made it a present reality by means of his powerful deeds and paradigmatic table fellowship with the social and religious outcasts of his day. He thereby lived out at the micro level the contrast society envisioned by the Mosaic revolution, and appealed to people to make a present decision in this regard which will affect their future standing with God (Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17).⁵⁸

55 Collins, "Eschatology" 298-299.

56 D.L. Petersen, "Eschatology (OT)", in D.N. Freedman (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary II* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 577-578; Carroll, *Prophecy*, 38-40; Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 106-107; Ceresko, *Introduction*, 107.

57 J.F.A. Swayer, *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 16-18; Carroll, *Prophecy*, 29.

58 D. E. Aune, "Eschatology (Early Christian)", in D.N. Freedman (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary II* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 599-602.

Taking inspiration and clue from the past namely the Mosaic revolution and the Nazareth manifesto and praxis of Jesus, Christians of the present times have the gigantic task of developing a new and alternative vision and project for the future. Thus they are called to usher in a new, just social order, modelled on the early Christian Community (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35), which would anticipate, as it were, the new humanity that would enjoy the Messianic peace for ages to come (Isa 11:6-9; also 2:2-5; cf Eph 2:13-16).

St. Paul's Theological College
Tiruchirappalli - 620 001
Tamilnadu

Concept of Time in Pauline Theology

Jacob Palliparambil

The Pauline Vision of the theology of time can be spelt out only if we place it in the context of Pauline perspective of the mystery of Christ: Incarnation, Paschal Mystery and Parousia, because the mystery of Christ is the content of time, incarnation its fulfilment, Paschal Mystery the manifestation of God's love and parousia the fullness of time. The time of the Church is the "now" in this process. Within this "now" Paul identifies his mission. So the challenge to Christian community is to be aware of the favoured time in which they live, filled and fulfilled by Christ.

Introduction

Among scholars there is an endless dispute over the issue of the central theme in Pauline thought. From the time of Martin Luther onwards, writers on Paul have proposed different themes as the unifying element of his theology. Themes such as justification by faith, eschatology, christology, God's salvific plan, soteriology, have taken central stage in the writings of various authors. The study of a particular theme, such as the concept of 'time' which we take up in this article, has to be linked with the central theme(s). That is how we can grasp the whole significance of such a particular topic. Only in the light of the whole doctrine of Paul, can we understand the role of this particular concept within the whole structural context.

Hence we make the following remark about the issue of the central theme in Paul's thought-pattern. The numerous central themes proposed by authors have their validity and soundness. However, no theme is as essential to his thought as the fundamental Christ experience that he had on his way to Damascus (acts 9:1-19; Gal 1:15-16). His encounter with the Risen Lord (1 Cor 15:8) transformed his personal life and gave a new direction to his life. It changed his vision of God, World and the human. His new *weltanschauung* changed his pattern

of thinking, speaking, acting and writing. Everything has been imprinted by the Christ experience he had. The same can be said of his vision of 'Time'.

In the light of Christ experience, the concept of time reckoned as moments, hours, days, months and years, and divided into past, present and future, receives a qualitative content and significance. Hence in the Pauline literature we meet with expressions such as "fullness of time", "the acceptable time", "the right time", "the short time", "the present time", "the opportune time", "the appointed time" and "the last times". By such expressions of time, Paul wanted to signify a span of time which is pregnant with content.

This span of time receives its inner content in relation to Jesus Christ. From the moment of Jesus' manifestation through Incarnation the concept of time, and therefore history, unfolds its newness and beauty. This is in a special way true of time from the moment of Jesus' salvific death and resurrection. Time also has a limit, which is demarcated by Parousia, the second appearance of the Lord in glory. This is called by Paul 'the day of the Lord'.

Therefore Christology is the pivot on which rotates the roulette of time in the thought of Paul. The time lived by Paul and a Christian community is laden with salvific content through the mystery of Jesus Christ. Christ explains (the concept of) time and fills it with an inner content. As a result, the community lives in an age of salvation. Until the Day of the Lord, when Christ will re-appear in glory, the Church lives in history, made up of time, but a time filled with Grace. Both these aspects of time are connected and mutually explain themselves. For the sake of clarity, we have divided this article into two sections: the first part explains the christological connotation of time, while the second part deals with the ecclesial aspect of time.

I. The Mystery of Jesus Christ: the inner content of time

Paul in his letters speaks of history as a qualitative period of time by linking it with the mystery of Jesus Christ. We meet

with expressions as “fullness of time”, “right time”, “the Day of the Lord” with the mysteries of Jesus’ Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Parousia. These mysteries of Jesus Christ give a particular qualitative and supernatural nuance to the temporal concept of time.

1. Incarnation as the time of fulfilment

In the letter to the Galatians Paul makes this statement about Jesus Christ: “But when the fullness of time (*to pleroma tou chronon*) had come, God sent his Son, born of woman, both under the law” (4:4). This statement appears in contrast to the period of the law about which Paul was writing in 3:1-29. In this section of the letter Paul was arguing that the period of the law, introduced through the sinaitic covenant, was not the direct and progressive continuation of the promises God made to Abraham (3:15-18). The period of the Law was introduced in the history of Israel in order to discipline them. The law was a disciplinarian. Just as the sons of the household are minors, they are put under a tutor who disciplines them. So also in the period of the law the people of God were in a situation of being minors. While they were still under the custodian of the law, they were not entitled to the privileges of the sons. They were equal to slaves in their own household and were not considered legally heirs: “My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all property; but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the Father” (4:1-2).

Therefore the period of the law is the opposite of the time set by the Father, The time set by God the Father is the time of fullness. This is the moment of fulfilment of God’s promises to Abraham. Paul further clarifies the point by saying that the promise God made to Abraham was like making a will. A will made and ratified by some one cannot be annulled. The will has a permanent and enduring value: “Once a person’s will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it” (3:15). The period of the law does not have a juridical value, so that it can cancel the promise He had made to Abraham. That is what endures and holds good for ever.

In the Rabbinic style of interpretation Paul claims: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his off-spring; it does not say, 'And to offsprings', as of many; but it says, 'And to your offspring' that is, to the one person, who is Christ" (3:16). By this Paul is proving that Jesus Christ is the only off-spring, who fulfills the promises of God. He links Jesus Christ with the fullness of time. The sending of the Son, by allowing him to be born of a woman and to live under the law, God has inaugurated the fullness of time when the people of God are declared majors, i.e., really sons and heirs of the household.

Hence we should assume that the fullness of time signifies a divinely determined span of time, which has run its course or a divinely ordained point which has been reached by the incarnation of Jesus. It means simply that the incarnation of Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promises. The explanation of G. Dalling 'sheds full light on the phrase "fullness of time": "Gal 4:4 carries the concept of the fulfilment of time decisely beyond the Jewish view. With the sending of the Son, time is fulfilled absolutely; it attains to its full measure in content as well as extent. The saying does not refer to abolition of time, but to the fact that God's saving work has come directly into history; in the historical event of the earthly Jesus God accomplishes His eschatological act".¹ Thus fullness of time is also the beginning of a new era of maturity and freedom as the Son of God. Incarnation and earthly life of Jesus inaugurates a new and definitive era in the history of salvation.

The expression "born of a woman" has caused a lot of discussion about the original birth of Jesus; but there is no contention that this phrase refers to the mystery of the Son's becoming man. It is true that Paul was not too much interested in the earthly existence of Jesus. There is in fact an exhortation from the part of Paul to ignore it: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way" (2 Cor 5:16). However as Markus Barth remarks: "In Pauline writings, the emphasis placed upon the cross

1. G. Delling, "Pleroma" in *TDNT VI*, P. 305

and resurrection overreaches the rare allusions to the birth and words of Jesus"²: Gal 4:4 is a direct reference to the mystery of the incarnation and earthly existence of Jesus. Besides, Paul refers to the descendancy of Jesus from David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3), and recalls to the readers the testimony of Jesus before Pontius Pilate (1 Tim 6:13). In the first preaching accorded to Paul by the Acts, Paul speaks of John the Baptist who preached before Jesus' ministry begun in Galilee (13:24). Therefore Paul does not ignore altogether the mystery of Incarnation and the earthly existence of Jesus from his teaching. Gal 4:4 affirms positively the great importance he attributed to the mystery of Incarnation. It inaugurated a new epoch.

The Incarnation of Christ in the world gives to time a new content. A qualitative time of grace has been inaugurated. History will no more be a haphazard conglomeration of events, a meaningless recurrence of events. The events of history will have a definitive purpose and move towards an apex giving to the various events of history a unity.

The event of Incarnation enlightens the past, present and future of history. The OT events and the period are not meaningless. The times of the patriarchs, exodus, the sinaitic covenant, conquest of the Promised Land, the Judges, Kings, Prophets and the Exile unfold their fullness by the event of the Incarnation and the earthly presence of the Son of God. However, the event of Christ is not to be counted as one among the several but important salvific events God enacted in time. It is a unique and single happening, with which a freshness and novelty which can never be fully matched or compared is introduced in human history. Christ's presence shapes the future events. He gives fulfilled content to the past.

2. Paschal Mystery: Time for God's Manifestation of Love

Not only the Incarnation and earthly existence of Jesus but also his death and resurrection introduce a qualitative period

2. M. Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, The Anchor Bible, New York 1967, p. 83

of time in history in as much as through the death of Jesus God's infinite and merciful love is manifested to humanity. The words of Paul in Rom 5:6 are to this effect; "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly". The relation between Jesus' death, time and the manifestation of God's love can be understood only in the context in which Paul makes the above statement.

Paul begins the letter to the Romans by presenting the main thesis of the letter in 1:16-17. Paul's thesis is that God has *now* revealed his righteousness in Christ Jesus and that every human who believes in Christ Jesus is declared righteous before Him. Wo/man is made righteous before God unconditionally and gratuitously and not for her/his merit. When wo/man is weighed by her/his own works, s/he is a nullity. To prove it Paul examines the life of the Gentiles and that of the Jews. Both have miserably failed before God and have become objects of God's wrath (1:18-3, 20). Wo/man needs salvation from God Himself. This is what God has now realized in Christ Jesus. He offers to wo/man righteousness in Jesus Christ, S/he has only to believe it and accept it in faith (3:21-31). At this juncture, Paul shows to the reader that God's logic of action is always in this way. Even in the promise God made to Abraham God followed this same logic of gratuity and faith (4:1-28). Abraham was justified because he believed in God's promises.

From Chapter 5 onwards Paul writes about the state of the human justified by faith. Justification produces some radical newness in the believer, The First newness is peace: "We have peace with God through Our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). Peace is the proper ordering of relationship between the human as human with God as God. The ordering of relationship between the holy God and sinful human was brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus. We encounter God's action in the crucified and risen Lord. Human possibility of being justified and thus be in peace with God was accomplished by God in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

Death of Jesus is central to the Christian message. It forms its nucleus. About the unique significance of Jesus' death and

Christianity, Karl Barth writes in his epochal commentary on the Romans as follows: "Neither the personality of Jesus nor the 'Christ idea' nor the sermon on the Mount, nor his miracles of healing, nor his trust in God, nor his love of his brethren, nor his demand of repentance, nor his message of forgiveness, nor his attack on tradition, nor his call to poverty and discipleship; neither the implications of the Gospel for social life or for the life of the individual nor the eschatological or the immediate aspects of his teaching concerning the Kingdom of God – none of these things exist in their own right. Everything shines in the light of his death, and is illumined by it"³.

It is precisely central to the Christian message because in the Cross there is the epiphany of God's love. In Rom 5:8 Paul asserts vehemently: "God proves his love for us in that Christ died for us while we still were sinners". The proof of God's love is the death of Jesus. The greatness and magnanimity of this love is shown at the time of Jesus' death for us not at the time when humans were righteous and holy before God, but at the time when they were sinners and deserved the wrath of God and its punishment.

This is the idea which Paul conveys when he uses the phrase "at the right time (*kata kairon*)" with the death of Jesus. The commentary of E. Kasemann at this point is worth recalling: "The point is that Christ did his saving work at an unexpected and morally considered, even inappropriate moment. Unworthy, genuinely ungodly people benefited from it ... We were the very opposite of strong when Christ died, and he died when we were still ungodly"⁴.

Thus the death of Jesus was the moment of God's supreme love for humans and it also took place at the time of humans abject sinful state. The right time of Jesus' death therefore alludes both to the love of God and human sinfulness. God's love and His wrath are simultaneously expressed in the death of Jesus. The effect of this saving death is now concretely realised in the

3. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford 1977, p. 159

4. E. Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, London 1973, p. 137

justification of the sinner. The love manifested by God in the death of His Son on the ignominious cross is now concretely revealed to the sinful human, when s/he is justified. At that moment the love of God is poured into her/his heart through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:10).

History, which is the sum total of events in time, receives a qualitative significance at the time of his death. By the death of Jesus, history is no more the adding up of events empty of content, but is a chain of events which necessarily have a salvific and redemptive connotation. Time is empty in itself, when it is counted in a material way, but seen in the light of Jesus' death it is a continuum of moments where the effect of his death has imprinted its enduring marks.

The right time should not be understood in a limited way and be applied only to sinners of Paul's time. The right time extends to the past and to the future. Humans who lived in the past as sharers in the sin of Adam and as transgressors of God's commandments in their own personal lives partake of the effects of Jesus' salvific death. So also the future generations until the end of time will share in the same death. Humans of the past, present and future will experience the manifestation of God's love in the mystery of Jesus' death on the Cross.

By his death Jesus was glorified by the Father, when he was raised from the dead, Paul points out that Jesus in the flesh is transformed into the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4). By his resurrection God has empowered him to be the dispenser of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in him. Jesus has indeed become the "Life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). Death and resurrection of Jesus has inaugurated the time of the Holy Spirit. During this period of time God will be continually and generously pouring over humanity the gift of His Spirit. It will be a process which will last until the Parousia of the Lord.

3. Christ as the Head in the Fullness of time

In the letter to the Ephesians we meet once again with the phrase "fullness of time" in relation to Jesus Christ. This is quite different

in content from its use in Gal 4:4. The context of its usage in Eph 1:9-10 relates it to the Risen Lord and to the Parousia of the Lord. Part of the Thanksgiving Hymn at the beginning of the letter, the text runs as follows: "He (God) had made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure that He set forth in Christ. That He should administer in the fullness time – all things are to be comprehended under one Head, Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 9-10).

The Hymn speaks of God's salvific plan in Christ Jesus (1:3-14). God has already realised his eternal plan, hidden for ages in Christ Jesus to elect a people, holy and blameless before him (1:4). They are now made adopted children and are endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit as a future guarantee of their glory (1:5-13-14). They have now received redemption and forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ (1:7). God's eternal plan does not end by it. His plan extends to the future. God's project is to set forth Christ to be the Head of everything in heaven and on earth at the fullness of time. In this context the expression seems to refer to the future times.

"The fullness of time" is to be interpreted in the light of the Parousia of the Lord. Paul often calls this eschatological period the Day of the Lord in invitation of the Prophets in the OT (Rom 2:5-16; 1 Thess 5:2-3; 2 Thess 2:1-2; 1 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:6; 2:16). As the very early Christian community, Paul believed in the second coming of Jesus Christ in glory.

At the background of the faith in the parousia of the Lord, there was the conviction of Jesus' Lordship over everything. In his famous christological Hymn in Phil 2:5-11, Paul with the Christian community confessed it. After the kenosis of the Son of God, God exalted him. Thus the Hymn ends with these words: "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confer that Jesus Christ is the Lord to the glory of God the Father" (2:9-11). In the same vein, the author of the letter to Ephesians speaks of Jesus as seated at the right hand in heavenly places "far above all rule and authority and power

and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. He has put all things under his feet" (Eph 1:21-22). The Risen Lord is the exalted Lord. The one who is seated in heaven. From the moment of resurrection Jesus is also constituted the Head: "and has made him head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23).

As he is constituted the head, he alone is its administrator⁵. He is *de jure* the head and its administrator. But in the fullness of time he will be *de facto* both head and administrator of all things. The fullness of time is to be identified with the day of the Lord, when he will appear in glory. The day of the Lord will appear suddenly and unexpectedly: "For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thess 5:2). Until that day, which is the time of fulfillment, Jesus the Risen Lord will be the head and Administrator of everything in heaven and on earth. God has chosen him to be that. As Markus Barth states: "Christ's role in God's election shows that the position of a son entrusted with the stewardship over all the possessions and administration of all plans and decisions of the master is a fitting image to describe Christ's unique honour and responsibility"⁶.

Even the Risen Lord is under the control of God. God is the one who brings about unity within the human race and between the nations through the agency of His Son. Since Christ is already functioning as the head of the body the Church and as the steward of all things, the fullness of time is already in action. It will be completely and fully realized at the end of times.

With the resurrection the stewardship of Jesus began to bring about newness of life. But at the Parousia this newness will be complete and perfect. When this is achieved, Christ as a good administrator appointed by the Father will hand over all powers granted to him back to the Father. Paul brings in this idea, when he speaks of Christ's resurrection in 1 Cor 15: "Then

5. Markus Barth, *Ibidem*, p. 86-87

6. Markus Barth, *Ibidem*, p. 128

comes the end, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power" (15:24).

Until the Risen Lord hands over all his powers back to the Father, he will run the course of history. The Fullness of time begun with his resurrection will reach its maximum richness at the moment of Parousia. Jesus Christ will exercise his rule and power and authority in the Church and in the World. Therefore Paul speaks of the church as a community of believers who live in a grace-filled era.

II. Grace-filled Time: the "Now" of the Church

The span of time from the moment of incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus until the handing over the Kingdom to the Father, is the "now" of the Church, the community of believers who are made righteous by God in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:26). The Church is at present time the remnant, chosen by grace (Rom 11:5). They form the common wealth made up of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22).

This community of believers live in the era of grace. This grace-filled present is enriched by the presence of the Risen Lord and by the transforming activity of the Holy Spirit. Paul calls it the acceptable time, the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2). It is the most favoured time in the history of salvation. As the community has the opportunity to live in this period, they have to live it in a fitting manner. They are to be children of light and to behave as children of light. Paul also understands his mission and activity in the light of this favoured span of time. He experienced both its demand and urgency, while he preached the gospel of salvation to the Gentiles.

1. "Behold, now is the acceptable time"

Referring to the words of Js 49:8 Paul writes to the Corinthians: "We urge you also to accept the grace of God not in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on that day of salvation I have helped you". Behold,

now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation!" (2 Cor 6:1-2). Paul writes these verses in the context of the Corinthian church's living the Christian life. He is exhorting them to accept the grace of God not in vain. Because the Word of God spoken through the prophet has come to fulfilment in their days and Christians are actually living in the period of salvation. As the servant of God, Paul is fully aware of this qualitative moment of history (6:4) and is reminding them of its importance in their lives.

The prophecy of Isaiah about the acceptable time and the day of salvation alludes to future times. It is uttered at a time when they lived in exile expecting an intervention from the part of God to deliver them from Babylon. God, the Holy One, the Redeemer of Israel (49:7) is assuring them of a future delivery from Exile. The people of Israel were then in an oppressed and despised situation. God, the Redeemer of Israel, will act with grace that is both incomprehensive and unexpected at a time of their utter humiliation. The time of humiliation and poverty will be turned into a time of God's favour and salvation, God has finally heard their prayer and is going to answer them: "They proclaim God's turning in favour towards one despised. They begin with the granting of the prayer, the answer to the nation's lament"⁷

In Isaiah, the "acceptable time" hints at the hour when God will once again turn in grace towards the people, while "the day of salvation" points to the moment of actual delivery as a result of God's grace⁸. It will be the new exodus as their fathers experienced the old exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. The prophetic words were fulfilled, when they were delivered from the yoke of Babylon, as they came back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and the City. However, the full meaning of this prophecy they realized did not take place by their return from Exile. Hence they applied it to the messianic time, when the prophecy will be fully actualized by God. The people of God was eagerly waiting for that acceptable time.

7. Cfr. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, SCM Press, London, 1969, p. 214

8. C. Westermann, *Ibidem*, p. 214

Paul refers to this text as a prophecy which is now being fulfilled in his times. Hence after citing the words of the Prophet, he says explicitly: "Behold, *now* is the acceptable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation". The community at Corinth as well as Christian communities elsewhere is now living in this situation, the now of salvation. The acceptable time and day of salvation brings with it a radical newness. So Paul asserts: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away; behold, everything has become new" (5:17). They live in an entirely new situation of history. They are the fortunate ones who experience God's intervention in their favour.

The new creation in Christ has taken place through reconciliation offered to them by God in Christ Jesus: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Cor 5:18). They share in the reconciliatory act and have become new creatures. They came to this state because God made His Son a victim for sin for our sake, "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). This is the present time in which the Christians are living. Days of God's wrath are over. Now is the time when God is making the human righteous before God gratuitously and unconditionally. The time of Grace has dawned on the human race. God has ended the days of humiliation for His people, because He has forgiven their iniquities in His forbearance: "it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

This is a time for personal decision and co-operation from the part of the human. God is generously offering grace and salvation. Humans should not waste this grace and opportunity. Hence Paul's admonition: "We urge you to accept the grace of God not in vain". They can in their personal freedom reject God's grace. Once they have received it, they can also obstruct the continuous flow of grace into their lives. Paul tells Christians that he as a minister of God does not put any such obstacles in anyone's way (2 Cor 6:3). Therefore, the acceptable time can also turn into a time of judgement for those who reject it and who put obstacles to its growth in their or in their fellowmen's lives. Those who reject the crucified Lord's grace of reconciliation

and righteousness will live at the grace-filled times untouched by its pervading effects.

2. Moral demands of the time

Since the present is the acceptable time, there is no question of a second chance for the salvation offered in Christ. The need therefore of taking a serious decision. The intensity of this decision is conveyed through the intensity of demands made on Christians. There are moral demands which are the outward expressions of this favourable time. Above all, the demand of neighbourly love with its particular characteristics is insisted by Paul (Rom 13:8-10; 1 Thess 4:1-12). There is a great urgency in the demand because they are living a time very close to the second appearance of the Lord. "You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers" (Rom 13:12).

By their baptism they have entered into the newness of the acceptable time. They are in the light and they are becoming closer and closer to the final day of absolute light. They must therefore live a life befitting the children of light. The first demand is to get awakened from sleep: "For everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ shall shine on you'" (Eph 5:14). Having received light from Christ, they are made wise enough to choose the good moral behaviour. This presupposes that they avoid evil, works of darkness: the life of drunkenness, debauchery and foolish acts (Eph 5:18). Instead they should use the available time of salvation for creative works of charity.

As it is a time of favour, it is also a time of evil (Eph 5:16; Gal 1:3). Christians should be wise to choose between good and evil. Hence the exhortations of Paul: "make the most of time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16); "conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of time" (Cor 4:5). As there is a time of grace and a time of evil, there is tension. Tension causes suffering in the personal life and that of the community that is the Church. The present time is characterised as a time of suffering. However it is very insignificant

in comparison with the glory promised to them at the end of times: "the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18). They should endure it until the manifestation of the Lord in glory (1 Tim 6:15).

The appearance of the Lord will be all of a sudden. It will be like a thief breaking into the house or like the beginning of labour pain for a pregnant woman (1 Thess 5:2-3). This unexpected eruption of the Lord's time is not to panic them, but to warn them to be prepared. They should be vigilant and sober as the children of light: "let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober" (1 Thess 5:6). To keep themselves alert and vigilant, they should be equipped with all spiritual weapons, both offensive and defensive. Hence Paul's advice: "put on the breast plate of faith, and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thess 5:8). In their struggle against the evil forces at work, they have to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom 13:14) and they must "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18).

As a result, Paul conceives the life of Christians in these acceptable times to be a life of continuous co-operation with the grace of God. In it is a process of transformation which is already begun in them through the Spirit. Day by day they are changed, so that at the end of the times, they will be found worthy of the Lord. Paul writes about what is happening in him and in the community during this period of Grace: "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). As the Spirit is undertaking this process of transformation within them, the Christians should co-operate with him by being jealous and ardent in doing good: "Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in Spirit and serve the opportune time" (Rom 12:11). The time granted to them is very short. In the short span made available to them, they should take the maximum profit out of it. Hence even what is not essential to salvation and obligatory in Christian life becomes an option in life. This is the sense of celibacy, which Paul advocates to his early followers: "I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short;

from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they have none" (1 Cor 7:29). Celibate life is not a demand of the present Christian life, but its deep significance can be measured only in the light of the eschatological era in which they are living. The urgency of the moment calls for concentration on the essential aspect of the Lord's coming. All the rest are of less worth, when this time factor is taken into consideration.

3. Paul's Mission in the framework of time

In the missionary life of Paul, he too experienced shortness and urgency of this grace-filled time, the 'now' of salvation. He was convinced of his mission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Gal 1:16). It was for that purpose God revealed His Son to him (Gal 1:15-16). He was also aware that the period granted to him to carry out this mission was very short. The mission of Paul to the Gentiles is to be understood in the light of God's Mystery which has been revealed. Once upon a time this Mystery was hidden with God, but now it is revealed to the Apostles (Rom 16:25-26; Eph 3:2-6). The essential content of the mystery is this: "the Gentiles have become heirs, members of the same body, and sharers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (Eph 3:6). In his turn Paul has become the chosen instrument in the hands of God to make this known to the Gentiles: "Because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the Gospel of God" (Rom 15:15-16). The final purpose is to bring the Gentiles "to bring about the obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26).

This is the task which Paul had before him, when he became an apostle of Christ Jesus. He had to fulfill this mission in a short span of time. Therefore, Paul's only ambition in life was to preach the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. He wanted to reach out to as many as possible. It is with this intention Paul travels far and wide sparing no energy and time which were at his disposal.

The core of Paul's argument is given in Rom 10:14-15: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one in whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without some one to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?" In short,

if the Gentiles have to be saved, they must believe. For faith they have to listen to the preaching and for the preaching some have to be sent. Paul has the self-consciousness that he is sent and therefore it is his task to preach the Gospel.

This is the reason why Paul undertook missionary journey. The Acts speaks of his three missionary journeys from Chapter 13. In his letters Paul mentions it often. The very purpose of his letter to the Romans was to introduce him to this community, because on his way to Spain he wanted to make a stop over at Rome (Rom 1:13). He felt that he had already preached the Gospel in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire (15:19) and what was left was the Western borders of the Empire. So he intends to go to Spain (15:23-29).

When the number of Gentiles whom God has intended to save reaches its fullness, the day of the Lord will appear in glory. Until that moment the people of Israel are hardened in their hearts (Rom 11:7-10). The people of Israel are rejected by God for a short period. This period is a time when some of the branches are broken off, so that a wild olive shoot may be grafted in to their place to share the rich root of the Olive tree (Rom 11:17). The branches that are broken off are members of the Israelitic community and the wild shoot of the Olive represents the people from the pagan world.

The establishment of a new messianic community made up of the Jews and the Gentiles was the task of Paul (Eph 2:11-22). On account of his consciousness about this task, Paul takes up a lot of hardships. He is not concerned with the judgement others pass on him: "To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day" (1 Cor 4:11-13; cfr. 4:5; 15:30; 2 Cor 11:16-29).

Paul spent his life time for accomplishing God's plan. Every moment of his time became the grace-filled moment because his whole concentration was on this task. Such was his sense of time that Paul writes with full satisfaction at the end of his life:

"As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim 4:6-8).

Conclusion

In Pauline theology time factor is understood in relation to the mystery of God revealed in Christ Jesus. Christ Event gives time its real significance. Time is not an empty entity, devoid of inner content. It is Christ-filled moments giving a supernatural and divine quality to human history, past, present and future. Apart from Christ, time is but a number or a division of the span of human existence. Once time is understood to be filled with Christ, then every moment is meaningful. Paul also claims that there are no special moments in the reckoning of time. When they lived without Christ, the Gentiles gave importance to the observance of special days and months and seasons and years (Gal 4:10). The moment a person recognizes and confesses Jesus' Lordship over time, then all the moments in the time of history turn to be grace-filled.

In fact, Paul's vision of the Christian community is that they are living in a short span of favoured time, filled and fulfilled by Christ Jesus. Each moment is transformed into a divine moment of salvation. There is no difference between the sacred and the profane. Each moment is used by the Christian community for the process of transformation, which was begun in them through justification. As they are living in this span of time, they are obliged to cope with the demands of this urgent period. Their behaviour is a witness to the quality of time they are living. Finally, Paul's vision of his mission is also conditioned by the concept of this qualitative time. He experienced the inner compulsion to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles in this short span of time. He spared no energy to fulfil this task in the short time that was allotted to God.

St. Joseph's Monastery

Eramalloor - 688 537, Alappuzha Dt.

Jesus, Time, Kingdom of God: Rethinking the Synoptic Vision

Augustine Mulloor

To reflect on time on the basis of synoptic narration is to re-capture the meaning of the centrality of Jesus-event which is considered the "kairos" of salvation History. This vision presupposes a predominantly linear understanding of time. A careful consideration of the biblical narration reveals elements of a cyclic vision of time too. Trying to think differently by re-reading the basic summary of the proclamation of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand" from linear and cyclic points of view, as complementary and dialogical perspectives, a theology of time is attempted. Various thematically important texts are read in this perspective. Thus time is envisaged as timelessness and the human as ensconced itself in the divine. Ultimately, we have temporality and theanthropia resulting from the Christ-event.

Thinking differently or regressing?

The awareness that one more millennium is passing by has given us a deeper cognizance of the reality and mystery of time. This conscious perception of the mystery of time today becomes all the more evident when we know that our forerunners did not treat the passage of the first millennium as extra-ordinary. Further, this is especially so because of the great anniversary of the birth of Christ, which is considered the turning point of history dividing it into two. Strangely, we seem to be quite clear in our minds about the concept of time as though it were an infinitely long straight line on which one can mark past and future events as one can ascertain (G.von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, SCM, London, 1975 pp 99f).

According to this concept revelation and history are seen within the framework of the linear time. God is revealing himself in time picking out particular points of the linear movements and thus history becomes salvation history. These particular moments or points distinguished by God's interventions are

called "kairos" specifically determined and appointed time or "today". All these moments are ultimately oriented to an end – "telos" which is the finishing line. Hence it is a goal-oriented and goal-directed line.

Within this vision God is over time as He reveals himself in time but transcending time. He is the Lord of time as He is the Lord of History. He is timeless. His realm is "eternity". Jesus is the fullness of God's self-revelation in time; he is "the kairos". Taking the Christ-event as the turning point of history we say that the "telos" is already guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the "already" of the "not yet". The eschatological age has dawned in the person of Christ, especially in his death and resurrection. And we hope that at the end time everything will be recapitulated in God. That is going to be a timeless situation in which God becomes the centre of everything and the divine power pervades everything.

In the above analysis, we have used the western, Christian categories of thinking. In fact, this is a concept that is alien to Israel. Israel did not conceive time as absolute without any relationship to events, as blanks to be filled up with data. "Israel could not understand time in abstract terms divorced from specific events" (G.von Rad). Hence at this juncture a number of questions seem quite relevant. Is God's self revelation an entry of God from timelessness to time? Is time already there and the events take place therein or can we say, the events themselves make time? Thus, how do we understand the Christ-event? How do we locate this event as the turning-point of time/history and how to explain its crucial and unique nature? How do we conceive eschatology in these categories? What is meant by the Kingdom of God? What is the meaning of the full revelation of the Kingdom of God in future?

On the other side, in the ancient civilizations like the Egyptian and Babylonian, the continuity of time was conceived to present itself in an unending repetition of the same thing in a cyclic manner. The periods of time repeat and renew themselves again and again, the course of the world not leading to a goal or end. This concept of time is marked by the constant rhythm or cycle

of nature. A similar vision is available in the Indian Hindu culture and even in Greek thought. In the biblical world, we said that the cyclic understanding has been slowly and progressively done away with and the course of the world is shown to conclude in the Kingdom of God in the latter days. The eschatological concept, the moving of everything progressively to a moment of fulfilment has pervaded other visions. Yet, we can find certain elements of cyclic concept of time in the biblical history. The themes and events seem to repeat themselves until history reaches a situation like that at the starting point, namely paradise. The old paradise is replaced by the new. The exodus is a world that finds its relevant expression at various moments of history: historical, symbolic at the time of the Babylonian exile and the definitive one in Jesus; so too the important thematique of call, election, promise, covenant and law in the O.T. has their counterparts in the New. Within the N.T. itself parallelism can be found in the development of many themes'. Are they not repetitions as we find in the process of interpretation that their meaning is mutually revelatory and reciprocally complementary? However, one is prophecy and the other fulfilment, one is promise and the other is accomplishment, one is the outset and the other consummation. Hence is there not a progressive onward movement and growth here? So, cyclic yet linear?

It is relevant now to bring in another situation of the believers of today in order to focus on the horizon of our re-reading of synoptic vision. The consciousness about the final events has become a very threatening motivation for conversion today. The end time is determined by some Sects and the events are narrated using the categories of terror and horror, fire and destruction, devastation and catastrophic events. Here the end is seen divorced from the present and the past and is presented with exaggerated formulae and hyperbolic language. A correct understanding of eschatology, therefore, depends on a balanced understanding of time both as linear and as cyclic not in a contradictory or dialectical way but in a complementary and dialogical manner. In this context and with this principle of synchronic reading, against katachronic and machronic approaches, let us try to rethink the synoptic vision of time and

Kingdom of God and their relationship to Jesus' person and mission and identify their challenges to us.

"The Time is fulfilled" (Mk 1:15)

After having introduced the ministry of Jesus through the ministry of John the Baptist, Mark reports the first proclamation made by Jesus: "The time is fulfilled". This is the description of the new situation that has dawned. The word "kairos", as distinct from "chronos" by which time is referred to in a general manner, is specific time (Ez 7:12; Dau 12:4, 9; Zeph 1:12; Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10). The word connotes salvation because it refers to a very special moment within the movement which has been determined earlier and has been awaited eagerly. This implication is underscored by the presence of the verb "fulfill". It has eschatological implications. It presupposes expectations, prophecies or promises. Hence the newness of the situation consists of the accomplishment of something in accordance with a previously designed plan. Because of the eschatological implication, it also means that the end time that was expected, has been now realized. It is the anticipation of the end.

Let us now move from "what was said" to "who said" it. The statement is made by Jesus and it cannot but be interpreted in relation to the life of the speaker himself. The fulfilment of time and the person and mission of Jesus are identified. Thus, it is not simply a filling up of a blank "space" that is called fulfilment but the event itself is time. A new dimension that was hidden so far has been spotlighted. Jesus himself is that new dimension. What was folded is now unfolded. Not that Jesus came from outside into time, but rather Jesus himself being the time fulfilled, became the key to the interpretation and understanding of everything already there. So time is not a secular reality moving towards timelessness. Timelessness itself is part of time but was remaining so far hidden, veiled and concealed. Presence of Jesus reveals that timelessness of time. What we have then is "tempiternity" (R. Panikkar). The historical is not denied here but interpreted. The meaning of the historical is brought to focus through the presence of Jesus because in him time is sacred and not an empty, passive, lifeless reality of secular character.

From the eschatological point of view also, this meaning is confirmed because what will happen at the end time is that God will become all in all; the divine light will pervade everything and transform everything. The theo-dimension will overpower every other dimension; the spiritual will gain momentum and will become and only basis of existence. That final stage (Rev. 21:22-22, 5) is anticipated in the person of Jesus. So Jesus is the fulfilment of time in the eschatological sense.

The “Today” and “Now” : Texts of Luke

Frequent and special use of “today” and “now” is the Lukan way of crystallizing the kairological centrality and significance of Jesus-event. On the basis of what we have said above, those texts reveal the timelessness of time with an emphasis on the present unfolding or blossoming dimension.

When Jesus was born it was said, “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you”. The reference is naturally to a historical event. But the purpose is to disclose that a totally new, but essential dimension has been added to the life now through the event in History. But the event itself is time. And so, “today” means that the life hereafter will be affected by the Jesus-event in which the fully unfolded theo-dimension of existence was spotlighted. The interpretation of “today” in the words of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21) – to Zacheus, “today I am to stay at your house” and “today salvation has come to this house” (19:5,9)– to the thief: “today, you will be with me in paradise”, all should be in the same vein. In the presence of Jesus the meaning of all the messianic prophecies is contained; letting God in Jesus into our house is the way to experience salvation; acceptance of Jesus as the Lord of one’s life makes one return to the original paradisaical situation of communion with God.

The “now” of 12:52: “From now on a household of five will be divided....” points to the radical transformation demanded by the awareness of the crucial nature of the theo-dimension represented and realized in Jesus. The division is between generations and not between members of the same generation:

Father, mother and mother-in-law against son, daughter and daughter-in-law. It is the image of a normal Jewish family consisting of parents with son and wife and daughter. If the axis of separation is "generation" it means that the patriarchal power structure has let itself be questioned by the theo-dimension that has pervaded the human life in the person of Jesus. A similar revolutionary rethinking, remoting in a reversal of the existing structures and paradigms is implied in 6:21-25 "Happy you who are hungry' *now*....." "Alas for you who laugh *now*....."

So those who come in contact with Jesus, experience a continuing "today" or "now" in their lives because it opens up the dimension of "the timeless" or "the eternal" in their time. This transforms their lives radically in relation to prophecies and promises, with regard to possessions and relationships.

"Signs of the Times" (Mt 16:3; Lk 12:56)

Jesus accuses the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt) and crowds (Lk) of not discerning the signs of the time/times although they are able to read the message coming from changes in nature. Hence Jesus' rebukes for their not recognizing the signs of the "times" in his teaching and miracles. His person and mission manifest the transcendental dimension that is there in every earthly and human reality. If they discern and accept this they will be able to experience "the eternal" and "the timeless" as part of the "temporal" or of "time". This sacred dimension is in fact not extraneous to the secular one, but is inherent in and part of the secular. Jesus' presence is the emergence of that in and through the secular, human, worldly. So when Jesus, the sign pervades and penetrates our life, all the other signs are included and integrated into it and they all become media for the revelation of the divine. So the pharisees, sadducees and the crowds who search for signs in order to believe, miss the theo-dimension of "the ordinary" things and events as revealed now in the person of Jesus and miss salvation itself.

"My time is near"; "My hour is at hand" (Mt 26:18-45)

The theology of time cannot comprehensively be seen if we do not link it with the death of Jesus. Jesus refers to his

death and resurrection as "my time" and as "my hour". When Jesus sends the disciples to prepare for the passover meal he instructs them to tell a certain man who owns the house: "my time is near". At end of the prayer at Gethsemane, Jesus says to the disciples, "My hour is at hand". The contexts of both texts specify the thematique of passion, death and resurrection as the main point of reference for interpreting the content of "time"/"hour".

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the perfect manifestation of the eternal in the temporal and the definitive revelation of the timeless in and through time. The moment of death of Jesus on the cross as narrated by Mark is the perfect expression of humanness, weakness, "worldliness", the crystallization of "time" (Mk 15:33-39). The death scene is permeated by the atmosphere of theophany from the very beginning. The echoes of Jesus' cry in loud voice signifying the utter, existential agony which Jesus undergoes and thus identifies himself with the humanness of the human, are heard in the midst of darkness spread over the whole earth. It is the preparation for theophany. And in fact the theophany takes place at the moment of death, voiced by the centurion, "This man was indeed the Son of God". Jesus who wedded humanness in death is the very image of 'God'. Time is itself timelessness.

This is narrated by Matthew, having recourse to apocalyptic language (Mt 27:45-54). The presence of God symbolized in darkness is the general setting in which the death of Jesus takes place. At the moment of death, "the earth shook and the rocks were split; The tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised". This is an apocalyptic description evidently. The message conveyed is naturally the outbreak of the new age at the death of Jesus. The eschatological age has dawned and therefore the temporal can no longer be considered the criterion for understanding the meaning of life. But the temporal has become the very manifestation of the external and the divine. That is why Mt can narrate the resurrection of Jesus proleptically already at the death of Jesus: "After his resurrection they (the dead ones saints) came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many".

With the death, for Matthew, the resurrection of Jesus has taken place, the transformed, risen, new life of the new age has been inaugurated. Thus the death of Jesus is the manifestation of the power of the eternal in and over the temporal, the total reign of the divine over the earthly, the spiritual over the worldly.

In the light of this explanation, "my hour" and "my time" in Mt 26:45 and 26:18 means the eschatological age in which perfect revelation and experience of the "timeless" in "time" will be possible. The death of Jesus is the turning point leading to such a new age now continued in the life of the Church. Church, therefore, is temporality moving towards the final "hour" of which only the sovereign Father knows (Mk 13:32).

Fulfilment Quotations

Technically the expression is applicable only to the Gospel according to Matthew, because he employs the O.T. texts, especially from prophets, introducing them with a special formula ("This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet/s") reinterpreting them christologically. However, the theme of fulfilment is part of all Gospel traditions because it is the tradition given by Jesus himself who presented himself and his mission in the light and as reinterpretation of the O.T. revelation.

So the fulfilment theme in general, and the quotations in particular show the repetitious character of events, progressive though, in the onward movement. The hermeneutical principle proposed by St. Augustine synthesizes the message: "In the O.T. is hidden the N.T. and in the N.T. is revealed the O.T.". The christological reinterpretation of the O.T. found in the N.T. is the revelation of the definitive mutation in salvation History where the theo-dimension inherent in it is definitively and decisively explicitated and everything else is shown as viewed in and through this dimension.

"The Kingdom of God is close at hand" (Mk 1:15)

The second part of the first proclamation of Jesus is the following "The Kingdom of God is at hand". This is a statement, parallel to the first one "The time is fulfilled" both together forming the "indicative" that synthesizes the quality of the new situation

realized in Jesus. The reflections we have made above on the related texts, therefore, help us now to understand the meaning of this statement and simultaneously it will contribute to the explicitation of the theology of time.

If time and the Jesus-event cannot be separated, time and Kingdom of God are not to be separated either. The Kingdom of God is the sum-total expression of Jesus-event too. The content of the fulfilled time is really the Kingdom of God.

First of all let us understand the divine aspect of the Kingdom of God. It is the situation in which God's reign is fully realized. It's preshadowing is found in earlier history in the O.T. revelation, especially in the covenant relationship between God and Israel. Is this only a foreshadowing of the reign of God? Does that mean that God from his part had not willed to reign over Israel, but now in Jesus he has willed? From the divine side, the will to reign was and is full never partial then, as it is not partial but full now. However, the divine dimension of life was not discerned, recognized and accepted. That shows the second essential aspect of the concept of the Kingdom of God, namely the "human" one.

Unless the human opens his/her existence to the divine reign, the reign of God cannot be realized. Therefore, the reign of God is the perfect, harmonious blending of God's action and human response.

Thus the question to be faced regarding the subject under discussion is about the qualitative difference between the prophetic times and the time of fulfilment? Can it be explained only from the linear point of view as God's definitive intervention into human history? The first verses of the letter to the Hebrews will serve as a perfect articulation of this: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by a son whom he appointed the heir of all things....." (1:1-2). The quality of the human response is not automatically raised by the fact of God's decisive intervention in Jesus. Is it possible to understand the reign of God from a cyclic angle without discarding, however, the objective dimension of God's self-revelation in Jesus, the

Son, at least in the interpretative level? In Jesus the perfect, balanced, harmonious blending of time and the human dimensions found expression. In Jesus, who is the "Word become flesh" (Jn) and "God-with-us" (Mt), the earthly, worldly, material, physical and sensitive are expressed in perfect harmony with the divine, spiritual, heavenly. The perfect openness of Mary makes it this visible, tangible, audible presence of God possible. That is how the reign of God and the person and mission of Jesus can be understood as identical. In short, in Jesus – the central moment of salvation history: "Die Mitte der Zeit" (H. Conzelmann), God's reign in the history from the moment of creation and more concretely, from the moments of call, election, promise and covenant found its perfect experiential form.

Now, there are two other dimensions of the reign of God to be taken into consideration, namely, "the already" and "the not-yet" as we designate them, the present and the future dimension. In fact we have referred also to the past and said that the present is a fuller expression in the visibility – audibility – experience level. On the linear level, we look forward to the end – "telos" – of time where it merges with eternity. So the eschatological is the final stage in which what was revealed in Jesus will find perfect global expression: the return of the "paradise", the perfect harmony between God's reign and the human's openness to it. So what happens in the interim period – pilgrimage stage – is a progressive extension and increasing depth of "the already" realized reign of God. The present is the fuller expression of the past and the future is to be the all – pervading global, universal, cosmic synthesis of the present.

The human beings and all the other realities of the universe through them, will realize the presence of the "timeless" in "time", "the divine" in "the human", "the other – worldly" in "the worldly", "the spiritual" in "the earthly" and thus a perfect "shalom" – wholeness will flow in the universe, everything recapitulated in God, in Christ. In this process of letting the perfect harmony centred on God to settle down in us, we experience a continuous tension and struggle between the divine and the human, the present and the future. That is in fact the theology of time in the context of the reality of the Kingdom of God as presented in the

synoptic tradition.

Thinking differently and progressing!

The linear understanding of time is the basis for interpreting salvation history. But this category is actually alien to the ancient Israel because for them history was actual events. Hence time was event and event was time. In course of time through interculturalization the linear vision gained prominence. Then, there is possibility of reading salvation history from the cyclic point of view of time, at least to a certain extent, parallelly with the prominent linear view point.

The re-reading of the synoptic understanding of the “fulfilment of time” and “arrival of the Kingdom of God” in Jesus from this mixed angle – linear and cyclic – without neglecting the historical objectivity of Christ-event itself, revealed that journey we make is not only a progressive forward only but also downward and one of extensive and intensive realization within ourselves and around ourselves of the fact that the timeless and eternal, the divine and the spiritual are in “time” and in the “human”. It is an experience that there is no meaning in dividing the world into “the secular” and “the sacred” because the “secular” itself is the “carrier” and “expression” of the “sacred”. Time, in summary, as unfolded and blossomed in Jesus, is the locus of encounter between the divine and the human; but not in a sense that time is there passively and inertly and the divine and the human being extraneous to it and then enter time and meet in time. Rather, time contains the divine and the human and a perfect harmonious blending of both while the divine as the source and centre finds expression in Jesus and is being realized in every human being. Hence the words of Jesus: “I will be with you, always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20) is to be understood as the dynamic presence of the divine in the human, of the eternal in the temporal, together making history; It is a salvific moving forwards and downwards and sideways. Ultimately we have no time and eternity, but “Tempiternity” and “Theanthropia”.

The Millennium Bug and John

Patrick Meaghar

The context in which we reflect on time is the transitional period from the second to third millennium. The author uses this as the starting point for asking questions about "time" in the Gospel according to John. Naturally, the answers bring us back to the completion of the cycle, with proposals for actual challenges. Jesus and his ministry, according to John, re-interprets all the time – symbols of the context, feast, sabbath, day and night, the hour etc. The invitation is to encounter Jesus and thus experience the new and special time. It should add a new dimension to our religiosity, to our encounter with the broken world and the injured and needy people.

The millennium bug has really taken hold of so many people for all types of reasons. The real Millennium Bug, Y2K results from the way computers have been programmed to deal with dates. The year like the day and month is indicated by only the last two digits, e.g. 98 and now 99. The "19" which indicates the century, is understood. When computers will see "00" on January 1st 2000 they will presume that this is 1900! What fun there will be in international finance, travel, planning...? However, the millennium bug can also be thought of in terms of the ways the coming "millennium" has infected so many people, institutions, and organizations.... Socio-economic organizations are going to use the occasion for profit. Sporting bodies will be slaves to it and people will use it as an occasion for special celebrations. There will be a rash of articles from journalists and writers. All types of apocalyptic sects are being born with fantastic pronouncements of impending chaos, final judgement and the end of the world. The Christian churches also are arranging special memorial services, religious celebrations through out 2000. The Catholic Church has had three years of special preparations and have a detailed calendar of celebrations planned for Rome and around the world.

A Millennium for Whom?

The coming millennium is in many ways a fiction. The Gregorian calendar constructed in 1582 determined dates believing that the birth of Jesus was at the beginning of the period signalled by Anno Domini. However, a mistake had been made as he was born more probably between 7 and 5 BCE (BC). The second Christian millennium is passing by! In the calendar of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and others who still follow the Julian calendar determined in 45 BC by Julius Caesar, the second millennium occurs in three years. In a country like India with so many religious calendars specific to different religions, the second millennium has no religious importance. For worldwide Islam and the Jewish world also the millennium has no religious significance. The Christian world, especially the Catholic Church, has decided to make it a special religious celebration, a Jubilee year with the opening of the Sacred Door in St. Peter's and other great Basilicas. We have borrowed an idea from the ancient legislation of our Jewish ancestors for whom the Jubilee celebrated the quality of human life demanded by the Covenant. The "holy door" in St. Peter's will be opened. To what will it be opened? Before proceeding we will comment on '0'.

Fascinated with "0"

There is a human fascination for "0" which in various forms we celebrate. In human life we celebrate a person's 60th birthday, the *sastipurti* and golden and diamond jubilees of various types. There are many types of celebration of "00". We mention only the institutional and national centenaries and birth centenaries. Birth centenaries are of special importance, not only of persons but also of institutions and nations. Our millennium is a big birthday party really, the second millennium of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. As we shall see, John's writings would suggest that a more appropriate and rich type of second millennium would be Jesus' death and glorification.

In cricket above all we are fascinated by the "0", the famous duck, half centuries and the ton, be they single, double or triple. We are also aware that "0" is unlucky. Therefore people donate Rs 101, 1001....

The figures ending with "0", "00" and "000" designate goals and turning points. So many of these special years are culturally conditioned human conventions. They are moments for memory and celebration, memory and reawakening, memory and regret and repentance, memory and gratitude, memory and rededication. The celebration of the millennium is a special ritual in which "000" catches the imagination of the human mind and heart.

John and Cyclic Time

After this introduction we turn to the idea of time in the Gospel of John in which there is a concern for time which is unusual and more pronounced than in the other Gospels. The first type of time we consider will be a cyclic type, the ritual cycle of festivals. Among these are the Sabbath (5:9; 9:14), the major pilgrimage feasts of Passover ([1st] 2:13.23; 4:55; [2nd] 6:4; [3rd] 11; 55; 12:1.20; 13:1.29; 18:28.39; 19:14), Tabernacles (Booths 7:1-14) and the Dedication of the Temple (Hanukkah 10:22) and an unnamed festival (5:1). This cycle of feasts makes up the framework of much of Jesus' ministry and his two journeys to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. These feasts are also one of the interpretative keys to his ministry since they provide a historical and religious background to his entrance into God's plan and his special contribution to this plan. Within this framework he gathers up centuries of celebration, expectations and promises and announces their fulfilment in his ministry. The reader is taken out of ordinary time into the time of God who spans all of human history from the "beginning" before creation and beyond its "end" in judgment.

The Feasts

In Jesus' first Passover visit the Temple is the focus. This was the major symbol of God's covenant with Israel, being the place of his special presence and the symbol of his commitment as Covenant Lord to loyal fidelity and mercy. The Temple was the assurance of blessings. Passover celebrated this covenant. The risen Jesus becomes the "house of the Father" and the symbol of God's unconditional loyalty and fidelity and the source of blessing.

The second Passover is the setting for the multiplication of the loaves and the subsequent 'bread' of life discourse. Through his death and resurrection Jesus becomes the bread of life, the living bread come down from heaven which is the source of eternal life. The Passover sacrifice gives way to his self-gift for the life of the world.

As the "Hour" arrives, the third Passover is the setting for the symbolic washing of the feet and the discourses to his disciples, his prayer and passion and death. This Passover becomes the "Hour" when he returns to the Father, having completed his work and established a new community. At this Passover he will be lifted up to draw all to himself and becomes the source of life for all who believe. At this Passover he shows the depths of his love. All the potential meaning of the Exodus-Sinai event and the long story of God's loyalty, fidelity, mercy and graciousness over centuries become a new and final reality at this Passover.

At Booths Jesus gives new meaning to the symbol of water (7:37-38) through the gift of the Spirit and to light (8:12) becoming himself the light of the world (12: 35-36, 46; cf. 1:4-5, 9; 3:19; 9:4-5; 11:9-10). Water and light were symbols associated with ceremonies in the Temple at this festival. Jesus as the Messiah, a major point of contention in chapters 7 and 8, is the source of living water and light¹. His death and glorification are presupposed in the texts. The major themes of judgment and testimony which recur in John (5:22.23-30; 8:15-16; 12:47-49; 19:35; 5:30-38; 8:13-18...) are discussed in the setting of this "I am" saying, namely I am the light of the world who both dissipates darkness and is the source of the "light of life" (8:12).

The Sabbath

The Sabbath is another significant recurring temporal axis for Jewish life. The Genesis text about the initial divine Sabbath could create problems because of the blank statement, "...God rested from all the work that he had done in creation" (2:3). Jesus, when attacked because he healed the man crippled for

1 I read the Greek text to signify that Jesus is the source of living water.

38 years, drew on Jewish Rabbinical tradition. He clarified the apparent divine Sabbath rest stating, "My Father is still working". As a justification of his act he added, "and I am also working" (5:16-17. Cf. 5:19). In 7:21-24 Jesus justifies the healing by using an argument more akin to reason given in the accounts of the other Gospels. In the case of the man born blind he claimed that his healing action would be a revelation of God's work (9:3) and his participation in the works of him who sent him (9:4). His opponents vainly attempt to substantiate their claim that "this man is not from God..." and "is a sinner" (9:16.24.29.31).

The Sabbath day takes on a new symbolism. It is the day on which God reveals his life giving power through the two healings. It is also the most appropriate day to reveal in such a paradoxical way the hidden reality and mission of Jesus. He is the Son who continually shares and collaborates in the life giving and judging prerogatives of the Father. The empowering presence of God is emphasized in 9:30-33. The Sabbath healings indicate that human history has been touched by the saving power so exclusive and proper to God. With the Son a new age has dawned.²

Day and Night

The daily cycle of time, day and night also become an instrument to throw light on Jesus ministry and his relationship to God in it. Jesus is a "day person". When asked about the sinful source of blindness he says, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work" (9:4). He adds, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:5). Hearing of his friend Lazarus's illness, Jesus delays. Then he decides to go to Judea. In reply to the fearful objections of his disciples who foresee further attempts of violence (7:30.44; 8:20.59; 10:31.39) he says: "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them" (11:9-10).

2 Schnackenburg has some insightful reflections on 5:16-18 and especially 5:19. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 2 Burns Oates, London, 1980 pp. 100-105.

In the text, which provides the interpretative background to the healing of the man born blind, "day" symbolizes the time designated by the Father for Jesus' ministry. Being a "day person" signifies that he is intent to do the will of him who sent him and to complete his work (cf. 4:34; 5:30.36; 6:38; 12:27; 17:4; 19:28.30). Because he is a "day person" he is the light of the world as long as he continues his ministry.

He contrasts "day" with "night." At an obvious level night was not the time to work in that period of oil lamps. Night has the further significance of the period of danger, evil and the absence of God. The reference would be to his passion and death (13:30). We note in the text the use of "we". Jesus associates his disciples with his God given ministry (cf. 13:20; 17:18; 20:21; 15:27; 14:12).³ In the second text the dark shadow cast by previous efforts to stone Jesus adds to its richness. To dispel their fears Jesus uses a type of proverb indicating that during the day there is no danger of trouble (stumbling) because there is plenty of light. Here he refers to the day as "twelve hours of day(light) because the Jews measured the day from sunrise to sunset be it summer or winter. Night was the remaining twelve-hour period of time. The text again is symbolic. Jesus speaks of the whole time given to him by the Father for his ministry. He will continue to do the work of the Father whatever be the dangers and obstacles. As earlier so also now he is in no danger as the "Hour" has not come (cf. 7:30; 8:20). His ministry continues until the "Hour" arrives. There is a warning attached for the disciples (11:10). If they live without the "light in them" then they will live in night and be in danger of judgment (cf. 9:39-41; 12:35). If they seek the will of the Father like Jesus then light will be in them (cf. 8:12).⁴ Time is daytime when it is held within the hands (will) of God and night time when not touched by God's hands.

The Hour is coming and now is...

Another reference to time, which is pregnant with meaning, ties Jesus' ministry in with the long and complex story (account)

3 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1. Burns Oates, 1980, pp. 241-42.

4 *Ibid.* pp.325-326.

of God's presence and actions within the religious history of his people. The phrase used runs, "...the hour is coming and now is..." (4:23 [4; 21]; 5:25). In the first text the Samaritan woman digs out an ancient point of conflict between her people and the Jews. Which is the authentic temple, the one found on Mt Gerizim or the one on Mt. Zion? Consequently, which is the genuine place of worship? Jesus according to John first affirms Jewish orthodoxy against the heterodox belief system of the Samaritans (4:22). Then he affirms the newness associated with his mission, which transforms the believer and as a consequence worship. He creates a new relationship with God (1:12-13) and a new centre of God's presence, namely himself (2:19-21). The new relationship and transformation rise from Jesus, who enfleshes the grace and truth of the Father through his revelation of the Father especially in his "Hour" (1:14-18) and the gift of the promised Spirit. The revelation and the gift of the Spirit enable the believer to worship God who is Spirit in "spirit and truth".

In the context of the bitter controversy about his credentials and the uniqueness of the life giving mission which he has received from the Father (5:16-30) Jesus makes this statement. He says, "Very truly I tell you, the hour is coming and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (5:25). The Father shares with the Son his power to raise the dead, to give life and to judge (5:20-23, 26-27). Therefore he continues that everyone must have the same rapport with the Son as they have with the Father (5:23). After a general affirmation that anyone who hears the Son's voice and believes the one who sent him has eternal life, has escaped judgement and has passed from death to life (5:24) Jesus reiterates this point more forcefully. Such a new period of time has arrived that the dead will hear the voice of the Son and those who hear will live. The "dead" could be those now spiritually dead, a symbolic use of the term or those actually dead as in 5: 28-29. I prefer the reference to final judgement and resurrection. This is the time beyond Jesus' "Hour".

In both texts the presence of Jesus, actually or proleptically, as Messiah (4:25-26) and the Son of God (1:18) within history creates a period of time, the present, in which past religious

history is superceded and the gift of eternal life is given to believers. The believer can now pass from death to life (5:24).

The Father's Time

Before we turn to the famous Johannine "Hour", we shall sketch the overall framework in which the evangelist interprets Jesus and his ministry. We shall first describe this in the words of Jesus in John. He says, "... for I have not spoken of my own but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak" (12:49). Again addressing the Father he prays, "I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do, so now Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (17:4-5). The narrator of the Gospel in his comments creates this framework. He notes: "For God so loved the world that he gave/ send his only Son..." (3:16-17), and "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father" (13:1) and further, "The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands" (3:35). The account of Jesus can only be understood within the larger and more determinative account of God the Father and his plan for the world. This is God's time.

The "descent" and later "ascent" of the Son of Man which together are the source of life for the world (3:13; [cf. The descent of the bread of life 6:33-58 and the ascent of the Son of Man 6:62; 20:17) are spatial horizons of his life determined by the Father. This is expressed in other spatial terms, namely Jesus' coming from the Father (3:8; 8:14.42; 13:3.16: 27-30; 17:8) and his going to/ away to the Father who sent him (3:8; 7:33; 8:14.21-22; 13:3.33.34; 14:4-5.12.28; 16:5-7.10.17.28). His return as the Son of Man to the Father is described as his being lifted up (3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34) and being glorified as the Son (7:39; 12:16.23; 16:14; 17:1.5). This dynamic relationship expressed in spatio-temporal terms and with family imagery (father/son) belongs to another type of time, inconceivable to us. This is the "time" described as "before the world existed (17:5) and "in the beginning" (1:1). Within both time frames God the Father has the complete initiative.

There is also another time frame implied in the Gospel. This is the time frame from creation including in a special way the history of God within human history. This is specified by his saving presence in Israel from Abraham to Moses and with the prophets of whom John the Baptist is the last (8:33-58; 1:17; 1:45; 6:44; 8:52-53...). This time frame was a period of expectation and waiting for the Messiah (1:20.25.41; 4:45.49; 7:26-27.31.41-42) and the prophet (6:14; 7:40; 9:17). It unfolds until the Day of Judgment, the Resurrection of the dead (5:22-30; 3:17; 12:47-48; 11:24) and the period of "eternal life".

The Father and the Son in Time

The "hour" is the climax of Jesus' persevering sensitivity to discern the Father's purpose. It is the culmination of his unambiguous commitment to the work given by the Father and the persistent decisions taken according to his guidance. To describe the relationship we could use the image of a synchronized dance. The Father is the invisible partner (1:18) who always leads - speaking and acting - and Jesus is the Son always responsive to each step of the Father. John uses an apprentice model. Jesus is the apprentice watching and modelling himself on the Father who is always working (5:17.19.20.30; cf. 14:10). He also uses the model of the genuine relationship between a father and a son. The emphasis is on the love of the Father, sharing his responsibilities with the Son (3:35; 5:20). The Son dwells in this love and demonstrates his filial love in constant obedience (5:30; 15:10; 14:31). To do and complete the work of the Father is the nourishment of the Son's life (4:34). John also uses the rich overtones from the image of thoroughly loyal messenger. Jesus finds his identity in fidelity to "the one who sent him". As the true messenger he does not come or act on his own (7:17.28; 8:28.42; 12:49; 14:10), but seeks only to do the will of his master (4:34; 5:30; 6:38-39), to do his work and complete it (4:34; 17:4; 19:30), to bring his teaching to others (7:17; 12:49; 14:24; 17:7-8), to seek his honour (7:18), to identify with him (12:44-45; 13:20b) and always to do what pleases him (5:30; 8:29).

The Hour

The consideration of the span of Jesus' whole ministry and in a special way his "Hour" must be made within this framework we have described. We shall now look at the specific texts, which refer to the "Hour". We have discussed two of these earlier when we looked at the texts about "the hour is coming and now is..." (4:21.23 and 5:25.28). The consequences of Jesus' "Hour" for his disciples are described in terms of "the hour is coming/ has come..." These include being scattered (16:32), being persecuted even to death (16:2) and being taught by the risen Jesus through the Holy Spirit with unmistakable clarity (16:25; cf. 16:12-15).

Jesus' own "Hour" is before all else the culmination of his life as determined by the Father. The "Hour" before all else concerns the Father not Jesus. Jesus is not arrested or stoned because the time determined by the Father has not come (7:30; 8:20). At a certain point of time in his life Jesus in John discerns that the "Hour" determined by his Father has come. He has completed his most significant sign, giving life to the dead Lazarus. Caiaphas and the leadership have determined to kill him with consequences determined by God beyond their wildest imagination (11:49-53). Mary has anointed him, unknowingly anticipating his resurrection (12:7). Fulfilling the divine plan, as Messiah Jesus has entered Jerusalem (12:12-16) and the Greeks have sought to see him (12:20-22).

At this juncture in his life Jesus solemnly affirms: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23).

There are a number of elements, which make up the "Hour". The "Hour" is the moment in history in which the Father glorifies his own name (12:28; 13:31). It is that moment in history when he pronounces judgement on the world and drives out the ruler of this world (12:31), lifts up and glorifies the obedient Son (12:32a; 13:31-32; 3:14b; 17:1.5), draws all to the glorified Son and through him gives life to all who believe (12:32b; 17:2-3; 3:16...). At the "Hour" the purpose of his sending the Son and the plan of his love for the world has been achieved.

The "Hour" has these many facets of significance for the

world because of the obedience of the Son. The "hour" is the supreme expression of Jesus' obedience, preceded by an anguished prayer (12:27; cf. 8:29; 17:4; 19:28 with 30) by which he fully glorifies and returns to the Father (17:1.4; 13:1) and expresses the depths of his love for his own (13:1b).

His First Sign

In the light of these reflections we note how at the outset of his ministry when Jesus worked the first of his signs (2:11), he affirms that this whole ministry was under the "must" of his Father's will. He distanced himself from his Mother's request and affirmed that the "Hour", namely his Father's plan, was the unique determinative factor in his life (2:4). A similar idea explains the puzzling interaction with his disbelieving brothers (7:1-9). Instead of using the term "hour" he used a similarly pregnant term, namely "My Time" (*kairos*) saying, "My time has not yet come/ fully come (7:6.8). We note that impending grave danger to his life overshadows his reply.⁵

The Harvest

Before turning to other individuals and groups in the Gospel account we summarize our reflections on time and Jesus. Time is meaningful in so far as Jesus is able to build constant and profound personal solidarity with his Father by "always doing what is pleasing to him" (8:28). Time is the opportunity to speak his word and share in his work, glorify his name, and reveal his glory, graciousness and unconditional fidelity (1:14-17). Time is gifted to him that he may dwell in his Father's love by keeping his commandments (15:9-10). This profound personal solidarity with the Father in his constant involvement in history is consummated when the Son, after having made the Father known and after having completed his work (1:18; 17:1-5), returns to him and shares in his glory. This solidarity built upon the Father's love and the Son's obedience transformed the world and made divine life available to all who surrender to God in faith. In the Gospel this surrender is mediated through surrender

5 I have found Schnackenburg's treatment of the term "hour" quite rich. *Ibid.* pp.327-331 commenting upon 2:4.

to Jesus Christ. Consequent upon the fact that the food of his life was to do the will of him who sent him and complete his work is the newness, which has entered human history. This is symbolized by the water become wine, the permanent spring of water, bread from heaven, ... the signs he did, his reinterpretation of Jewish symbols and festivals and his "I am" sayings.⁶

We note that Jesus in John does less discerning and searching for God's will than the Jesus of the other Gospels and the letter to the Hebrews. The unwavering and uncomplicated solidarity is consistently emphasized. I judge that in the celebration of the Jubilee Year Jesus' constant concern to do the Father's will could be a major criteria for discerning appropriate ways to celebrate the wonder that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (1:14).

The Encounter with Jesus as Special Time

Though time terms are not used in the accounts of people who meet Jesus in the narrative, yet we can look at these accounts. Time is related to the encounter with Jesus. Time is an opportunity for decisions, which lead to life, or an opportunity missed which will lead to judgement and remaining in darkness. During the journey of their lives various people encounter Jesus. We shall look at these encounters.

Andrew and another disciple of John, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael and others grasped the opportunity (1:35-56; cf. 2:1; 6:67-69). Some disciples of John found Jesus a scandal (3:26). In terse and dramatic narratives the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans, the man born blind, Martha and Mary all take decisions, which lead to life. The parents of the blind man, different Pharisees, some mourners at Lazarus' death (11:37.46), the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas all threw away the opportunity in more or less disastrous ways. Jesus' family fails. Nicodemus is initially ambiguous, later opposes the majority

6 I do not wish to reflect upon the limited horizons of John's interpretation of Jesus because of its concern with serious concrete problems of identity facing the community addressed. I also avoid comments on the dangers arising from its polemical character.

opinion (7:50-52) and joins Joseph as a genuine disciple (19:38-42). The ruler learns and grows through his encounter (4: 46-54) but the paralyzed man remains an enigma (5:1-15). John the Baptist proves the depth of his faith and fidelity to his mission (1:19-34;3:25). The Greeks are drawn to Jesus. Lazarus and his sisters grow in deeper faith and celebrate their benefactor's goodness (12: 1-8). The sinful woman remains silent while her accusers remain in their darkness. The common people are at times superficial in their responses (2: 23-25; 4:43-45), misinterpret Jesus (6:14-15; 25-26), are scandalized (6:41.52), puzzled by him (7:25-27. 41-43), openly opposed to him (7:12.20) or are courageous and forthright in their decisions (7:12.31.40; 10:41-42). The Temple police are fascinated (7:45-46). Some authorities lack the courage to openly express their belief (12:42-43). Some Pharisees disagree with the majority opinion (9:16).

Through out the narrative there is the tragic group normally called "the Jews". They became more and more violent in their resistance, denunciations and planning to destroy Jesus. These are at times identified as Pharisees and at other times the Chief Priests. This story of tragedy gives the Gospel a particular type of poignancy. Anyone can belong to the group named "the Jews". In the Passion and Resurrection narratives we could also study the ways various people respond to the opportunity given to them. In this long account and in other narratives there is often a pattern of contrast. There are figures and groups who seize the opportunity and find life and those who prefer death. Pilate remains in no man's land and many have joined him there in history. Mary, Mary Magdalene, the beloved disciple, Thomas and the repentant and distraught Peter grew in stature as believers.

The Reader?

Throughout the reader is challenged. The accounts of individuals or groups are exemplary and symbolic. Readers can identify with various contrasting figures. We shift in our decisions during the journey of life. We can be unambiguous believers and later puzzled, reluctant and half-hearted. At times we fail

and refuse to believe that God in Jesus Christ can be present to us in certain types of circumstances and people. We miss many "Hour", times when God is present in unexpected and hidden ways. In John, time for those in whose lives Jesus enters is an offer of the opportunity to believe. To believe is the form obedience takes in this Gospel.

The Third Millennium and the Jubilee

We return to the Millennium and Jubilee. I saw recently a detailed calendar of religious celebrations planned in Rome for the city. The plan included each Sunday of the year 2000, many feast days and each day of Lent. The calendar is rich and diverse reflecting many of the great movements in the Catholic Church initiated earlier in this century, given expression in Vatican II and the life of the Church in the last thirty years.

There will be Jubilee celebrations for youth and adults, the married and sick, for clergy, consecrated men and women and the laity. There will be special Jubilee days for artisans, professionals, agriculturists, journalists, the entertainment world. Special congresses are planned, special liturgies representative of the Eastern and Western Catholic traditions, Orthodox traditions and ecumenical liturgical services. Special days are designated for ordinations and the regular recitation of the rosary. There will be appropriate celebrations in all the great churches of Rome. There will be....

Discerning Appropriate Ways to Celebrate

Reading John and reflecting on the coming Millennium as a sacred or special time within God's plan I wondered what could be the focal point. I suggest that the persistent, sensitive and committed search for God's will be the way to celebrate the Jubilee. Jesus in John would be the model. The various persons in the Gospel could guide us in the way we search and respond to God in Jesus Christ meeting us in the Millennium.

A text from Isaiah reiterating a frequent warning in the prophets could help us. John's Gospel is rich in its portrait of the Son unwavering in his loyalty to his Father and his work.

Also there are the inspiring figures of great believers like Mary Magdalene, the man born blind, the Samaritan woman, the searching and honest Nicodemus, those in the crowd whose voices are raised amidst disbelief and violent reactions. The Millennium is an occasion to celebrate the great movement of the Word/ Son from the mystery of God to being enfleshed in our history to reveal the Father. John's particular circumstances prevented him from portraying the poor man of Nazareth so committed to others that he had nowhere to lay his head. However, spiritual poverty and human darkness surround him. Yet the consequences of such darkness in the socio-cultural and economic life of the people do not stand out in his Gospel. What type of daily decisions may embody the choice of God's will for the ordinary believer is not so clear.

The Dangers of the Millennium Celebrations

The celebrations of the Millennium have inherent dangers. One of these is the danger of religious celebrations. There is also the danger of expensive and elaborate ceremonies and celebrations cut off from the life of the majority of ordinary Christians especially in the Asian, South American and African world. There is the danger of a two day congress for the Lay person in the Church being sidelined by canonization's of clergy and religious, impressive Episcopal and priestly ordinations, clerically dominated Eucharistic and Marian congresses. There is the danger of tourist pilgrimages rather than the simple pilgrimages into the mystery of God in Christ and the Spirit, into the light and shadows of the human heart and into the joys and tragedies of the human family. The wars, famines, massive refugee problems, racial, gender, religious, social and economic discrimination and oppression, the normal struggles in family, single mothers, ... can be so easily "celebrated" in empty words and distance prayers.

A Wonderful Opportunity

The Isaian text reminds us in unambiguous ways of the behaviour that in the midst of religious celebrations assures us that we have made our food the will of him who also sent us to

complete his work. In the context the prophet critiques religious celebrations and occasions with the signs of genuine religion. We quote at length his words.

"Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free
and to break every yoke.

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
When you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
... If you remove the yoke from among you
the pointing of the finger, the speaking evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness,
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually,
And satisfy your needs in parched places,
And make your bones strong;
And you will be like a watered garden,
Like a spring of water
Whose waters never fail" (Is 58:6-14).

Jesus in John is persistently concerned with sin and evil. Sin has a human face and institutional face. Evil expresses itself not only as being born blind, being a cripple for years, or being three days in a tomb or lacking wine, Slums, famine, civil wars, ostentatious luxury, expensive pilgrimages, disregard for human life from the womb to old age, the human dignity of each

person and the quality of life and ... are all areas where Jesus intends the Christian communities to bring life. Jesus has made an amazing promise to us: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." This is followed by a challenge, "dwell in my love" which he clarifies, "if you keep my commandment, you will abide in my love. The commandment is "that you love one another as I have loved you" (15: 9.12). The Isaian text with its rich symbolism could be an apt and suggestive text to guide us in our world during the preparation for the Millennium and during 2000. This could be our "hour" and the opportunity offered to us by the Father to meet Jesus Christ in a new way – in religious celebrations and in challenges of a broken world and injured and needy people.

Vidyajyoti
Delhi.

Time-Theology – extra bits

1. Resurrection of Jesus: the Tempiternal Event

Resurrection is a historical event and at the same time trans-historical. Hence it is an event that belongs to tempiternity. In this event time and timelessness: the human and the divine, the historical and the transcendental, the earthly and the heavenly, the temporal and the eternal meet. Therefore it is the guarantee of the full flowering of the Kingdom of God, the pledge and anticipation of the final moment when everything earthly will be transformed by the spiritual.

Since it is a tempiternal event, resurrection itself cannot be experienced except the empty tomb and the Risen one. The empty tomb tells us that the body is not there. But the appearances of the Risen one tell us that he is present. When the Risen one appears to the disciples, he shows his hands and feet to them. They carry the wounds of the crucifixion. This is the language of tempiternity. The Risen one belongs to the trans-historical and yet paradoxically he appears at the historical and temporal level. When the disciples articulate their experience of the Risen one they have recourse to historical and temporal expressions like: we have seen him, he has eaten with us etc. The disciples are in the room with the doors closed. The risen Jesus yet comes inside and is in their midst. He is physical yet trans-physical. The risen Jesus has breakfast with the apostles, yet a risen person does not require to eat. He has a transformed body.

In the death of Jesus we have the perfect expression of the identification of God with the human in its radically transparent form. In the same way in the resurrection, which is the result of the powerful action of the Spirit we have the perfect expression of the identification of the human with the divine in its most subtle form. So we can say, God reveals Himself in the human and the human finds him / herself in God.

Practical bit of reflection: Time is not an 'extra-thing-lying-there' into which we enter from outside. It is our own life. When we live our life fully by denying ourselves and finally dying to ourselves, we become perfectly one with the reality of time. Then, the Divine in us, the Spirit is released and thus our life becomes source and an expression of timelessness or eternity. When this experience fully grows in all its dimensions and becomes ripe to the maximal point, and in a stable way, not only on the individual level but also on the communitarian level, in all the universe, then is the end time. Hence, the resurrection of Jesus is the prolepsis of the end time; it is the tempiternal event.

2. Apocalypse is the tempiternal language

The church of Asia Minor or the seven churches in Asia Minor are under persecution. The emperor has given orders, indeed very strictly under threat of capital punishment, that he should be worshipped as the lord and god. The faith of Christians that Jesus Christ is the only Lord and God became a cause of persecution and suffering. They saw, how powerful and successful the roman emperor Domitian was. They began to evaluate their experience simply from the temporal, physical, earthly point of view. The result was despair and meaninglessness of life. They, in short, failed to discern the thread of timelessness and the eternal running through their experiences.

The situation was similar to the one which the people of God experienced in Babylonia in the period of exile. The situation made Israel say, "My way is hidden from the Lord and my right is disregarded by my God" (Is 40: 27). The desperate situation of the people is described by Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Bablylon there we sat down and there we wept.....". The teaching of the prophets in this context was a challenge to discern the presence of God in the midst of suffering and persecution. That was the beginning of Sabbath celebration: encountering God in time in the given situation of life, a God who is the Lord of time and history. This is also the *Sitz im Leben* of the origin of apocalypse. They were challenged by the prophets to experience the Divine, the transcendental, the eternal not as someone extraneous to the human, earthly, temporal but as part of it. It is in this

discernment and recognition of God in time that reveals the meaning and relevance of the actual historical situation. It alone gives us the key to the interpretation of history in an all-comprehensive manner.

The prophet of Asia Minor is given the key to the interpretation of the events taking place in their history: "what must soon take place" (1:1). So towards the end he has been told: "It is done" (16:17). How does he know the secret or what is the mystery?

In 4:1-5, 14 the book describes the introductory vision. The prophet is taken up into heaven and is given a chance to look at the history from "above" from the side of God. Who are the characters in the heavenly vision? The throne, one seated upon the throne, the scroll in his hands, the slaughtered lamb and then many others. The throne and the one seated upon the throne represent the sovereign God for whom "heaven is the throne and earth is the foot stool" (Is 66 : 1). He is the Lord of history. That is why he has the scroll of the meaning of events taking place in the church in his hands. It is not without his knowledge that they are happening, including the persecution. How can this scroll be unscrolled? How can the meaning of history from the point of view of God, the Lord of History be unfolded? The scroll that is closed with seven seals has to be opened. But who can open the seal? The slaughtered lamb is the risen Jesus, the incarnate Son of God who underwent death and was raised back to life through the power of the Spirit. He alone is worthy to open the scroll. The rest of the book reveals in apocalyptic language the meaning of events and the need to remain open to that meaning going through the events of history, even persecution and suffering with patience and perseverance.

Practical bit of reflection: The prophet is on earth, yet he is in heaven. He sees the historical events, yet he sees the transhistorical in them. He recognizes the divine dimension of human experiences. He discerns within time the presence of the timeless and the eternal. Apocalypse is the language proper for temporality.

3. **"So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart" (Ps 90 : 12): Prayer for the wisdom of tempiternity**

Psalm 90 is a community lamentation. It articulates in the presence of God the frailty and transitoriness of human life: "you turn men back into dust....."; "you sweep them away, they are like dream"; "like grass.....". Simultaneously prayers, i.e. the community, are aware of the greatness and might and authority of God. So they are praying for wisdom. And the wisdom in its concrete expression, they desire, is to learn "to count our days". Those who know how to count their days will be always aware of the greatness of God and of his presence as a guiding hand throughout their transitory human earthly journey. So in the transitoriness itself they learn to recognize the permanent and eternal. Hence learning to count one's days will not lead us to despair and unhappiness because he will have the wisdom of identifying the meaning of time in the timelessness and presence of the eternal in the temporal.

Practical bit of reflection: there are not two worlds. There is only one: the tempiternal. Hence the attitude demanded is that of wisdom that blends the realism with spirituality in a harmonious way and thus finding in one's life a perfect harmony, i.e., wholeness, peace, 'shalom'.

4. **Church is the visible symbol of tempiternity**

Church is the sacrament. She reveals the divine in the human, the eternal in the temporal. She is the symbol of the harmony resulting from the transcendence of the secular and the sacred. If both are perfectly blended in Jesus, in the church too this combination should be visible. Hence she has to be so earthy, human, ordinary, temporal, historical and yet she has to be so heavenly, divine, extra-ordinary, eternal. She has to be one with the people struggling for liberation from the social serfdom and slavery, yet she has to look up to the heavenly vision of the throne, the One seated upon the throne with the scroll in his hands, the slaughtered lamb who has overcome the world by embracing it in death to be able to reveal to the suffering

people the mystery of “all that is taking place” and thus give them the openness to recognize and experience in the midst of their toil and sufferings the emerging new heaven and new earth or rather the heaven on earth and the earth in heaven.

Carmelite Theology College,
Manjummel - 683 501.

Augustine Mulloor

Book Review

Antony Fernando, *CHRISTIAN PATH TO MENTAL MATURITY. A Lucid Exposition of Christianity for the Multi-religious Classroom*, Inter-cultural Book Promoters, Eldeniya (Sri Lanka), 1998, iii + 262.

Religious education has become today an important concern of the larger society. Not without reason, United Nations, which has declared the year 2000 as the year of the culture of peace, has set up a commission to study the state of religious education in the different parts of the world. The conviction behind such an enterprise is that the emergence of a culture of peace can be facilitated by an appropriate religious education.

At one level religious education can be viewed as something that religious communities impart to their respective adherents, and notably to the rank and file of its clergy as well as leaders. It may take place in formal and non-formal ways, or in an informal manner as in the milieu of the family in daily life. This type of education has a *confessional character* since it is meant for the followers of a given faith.

Of course, no one can dispute the right to know about one's own religious tradition. On the other hand, the current situation leads us to be preoccupied whether and to what extent the spirit and teachings imparted, specially to the religious clergy, mullahs and other leaders contribute to the culture of peace. It is too well known that such an education mostly taking place in closed environments or institutions can be a dangerous source for communalism; it can whip up communal passions and foment conflict and violence. That is why it is imperative today that any such religious education be carried out with a sense of responsibility and accountability to the larger public.

There is also another level of religious education: it is

education about religions As such it is even more a matter of public concern. We need to devise new educational strategies capable of generating positive awareness and knowledge about the religious experience, tenets and symbols of our neighbours. Respect will flow from knowledge; many prejudices will vanish into thin air. This is such an important aspect that even an avowedly secular state in a multi-religious society cannot afford to ignore. It is a question of public peace and harmony.

In this general context, the present book by the Sri Lankan author, represents a significant attempt for religious education in a multi-religious context. It does not simply theorize on this issue, but concretely shows how such an education can take place by presenting Christianity, its spirit, practice and orientation for the multi-religious classroom. In this way the author fills a lacuna. For, the prevailing educational means (catechisms, text-books, audio-visual aids, etc.) are prepared for instruction within a particular religious community.

In elaborating Christianity for multi-religious educational purpose, the author is guided by a general theoretical orientation. He spells out this orientation clearly in the first part of the book before going ahead with the presentation of Christianity. A most important theoretical point concerns the author's distinction between two types of religions. He names them as "clan-centric" and "life-vision". What he means is that the institutional religion tends to be tradition-bound, oriented to preserving the past, safeguarding uniformity and providing a sense of security. On the other hand, the "life-vision" of a religion consists of the core elements in it or the spiritual message that transcends the particular way it is lived-out in a clan-centric atmosphere. Though the author recognises values in both these forms of religion, at certain passages, one begins to wonder whether the author has not over-stretched the distinction to a position of polarization between the two. Such an impression gets confirmed in the way he presents Christianity.

There are two other concepts which further reinforce the distinction of the author and also offer the key to understand the overall concern of the book. It is the twin concept of *adult*

and *maturity*. In fact, the word maturity is part of the title of the work. By adulthood the author means a situation in which one is freed from the fetters of the institutional religion. Here we can hear the echo of a religious understanding in the modern secular world as raised by thinkers like Bonhoeffer and A.T. Robinson. In fact, the secularization theology spoke about religion in a world that has become adult, and was concerned about presenting God, religion and morality to a world that has come of age. This is not the line of orientation the author adopts, even though he underlines that one has to take into account this cultural fact along with the growing multi-religious situation in any programme of religious education. Adult is co-related to the concept of *maturity*. Adult in the sense of the author (keeping with his distinction of "clan-centric" and "life-vision") is someone who has outgrown the institutional, traditional and structural boundaries of religion, and "mental maturity" means in this context the reaching of the core-element of religion in its spiritual import. In traditional terms – according to the author – this would be something closer to concepts like "holiness" and "spiritual perfection".

The project of presenting Christianity in a multi-religious class-room situation has led the author to rethink afresh the Christian message and tradition. After dealing with the general question of religion in the first part, the author goes on to present religion (particularly God-belief) in Jewish tradition, in Jesus' teaching and in the early Church. The third part is devoted to the study of the Church today in which the author deals with the beliefs about Jesus Christ, ceremonies and festivals, and finally distinguishes two forms of the Church: One is the institutional Church, and the other, for want of a better expression, he calls "Church-of-the-pure-hearted". What he means can be inferred from his general orientation. It is the reality of community in its inner and spiritual dimension untrammelled by institutions and structures. The last and final part is an attempt to present Christian insights on right living, adult attitude to life and the role of the Christian in the modern world.

That the author responds to a real need of the times and

addresses a right issue is beyond question. The project of the author is indeed very commendable. The author has competence to undertake this enterprise, as he is highly qualified both in Buddhism and in Christianity, and has also taught these religions at higher levels of education. Project is worthwhile, and competence is not lacking. But to what extent the author succeeds is another question. In this regard, let me point out a few things which require further consideration.

The concept of "mental maturity" the author employs and the approach he adopts, evokes the idea of an intellectual or "gnostic" Christianity abstracted from concrete historical processes. Such a Christianity may appeal to a bourgeois group (of a liberal stamp) who are interested in a "pure" Christianity in its spiritual essence as a system of knowledge, or to upper castes and classes (Brahminism, for example) cultivating religion simply in its ideal form as *vidya*. As the experience in South Asia demonstrates, Christianity has been most attractive among the lower and subaltern sections for what it represents for them through its message of *freedom* and *emancipation*. On the other hand, a "gnostic" type of Christianity is something that found appeal among the higher classes and castes. We may recall thinkers like S. Radhakrishnan who saw Christianity only from this aspect. The very presentation of Christianity in a multi-religious class-room context needs to take into account this difference.

Most helpful would be at this juncture the presentation of Christianity as a force that challenges the prevailing order of things, and contributes to the transformation of social and political conditions. To be fair, the author refers passim to such concerns, but, in my view, it is too weak and not sufficiently articulate and focused. The dominant approach adopted by the author remains that of wisdom and knowledge. There is of course, room for freedom, but it is a freedom of the self, an inner reality. Freedom as a historical reality to be won through struggles requiring an option for subalterns, the marginalized, would have given the book a greater contextual relevance in the present situation in South Asia. The presupposed multi-religious audience in the book is elitist, urban and bourgeois in character. I wonder

whether the situation of a multi-religious audience made up of people who live by popular religiosity are not to be taken into account.

To widen the agenda of the author, we may think of not only a project of responding to a multi-religious class room, but also efforts to present Christianity to groups of people belonging to a particular religious tradition, say, Christianity presented to Hindus, Christianity presented to Buddhists etc. In such cases, the presentation of Christianity will have to be in tune with the categories used in the respective religious traditions. On the other hand, this offers also the opportunity for development of contextual theologies in multi-religious societies. For, the very fact of having to present one's own religious experience, beliefs, traditions etc., forces one to a re-thinking of the particular religious tradition, opening up in the process new theological insights and orientations.

The book under review can be considered as a pioneering work, in spite of some of its shortcomings. The style is lucid and crisp. There is flow of thought and progression in the way the book is planned and executed. Religious educators, theologians, and all those who are interested and involved in dialogue will appreciate the project undertaken by the author.

School of Philosophy and
Religious Thought
University of Madras

Felix Wilfred

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